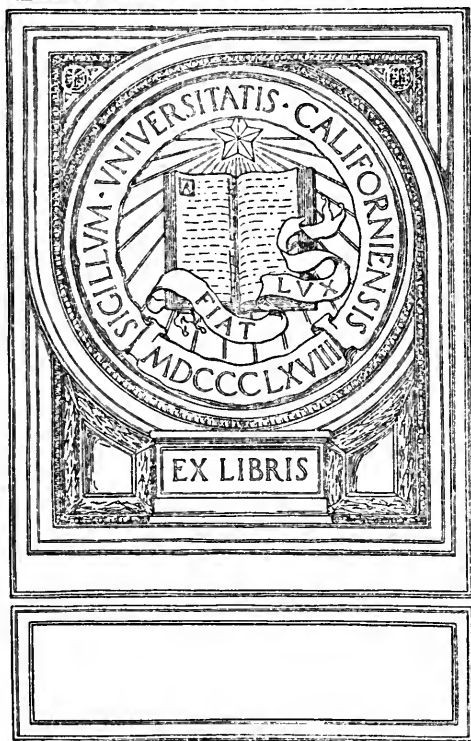




WACK HARKAWAY IN AUSTRALIA

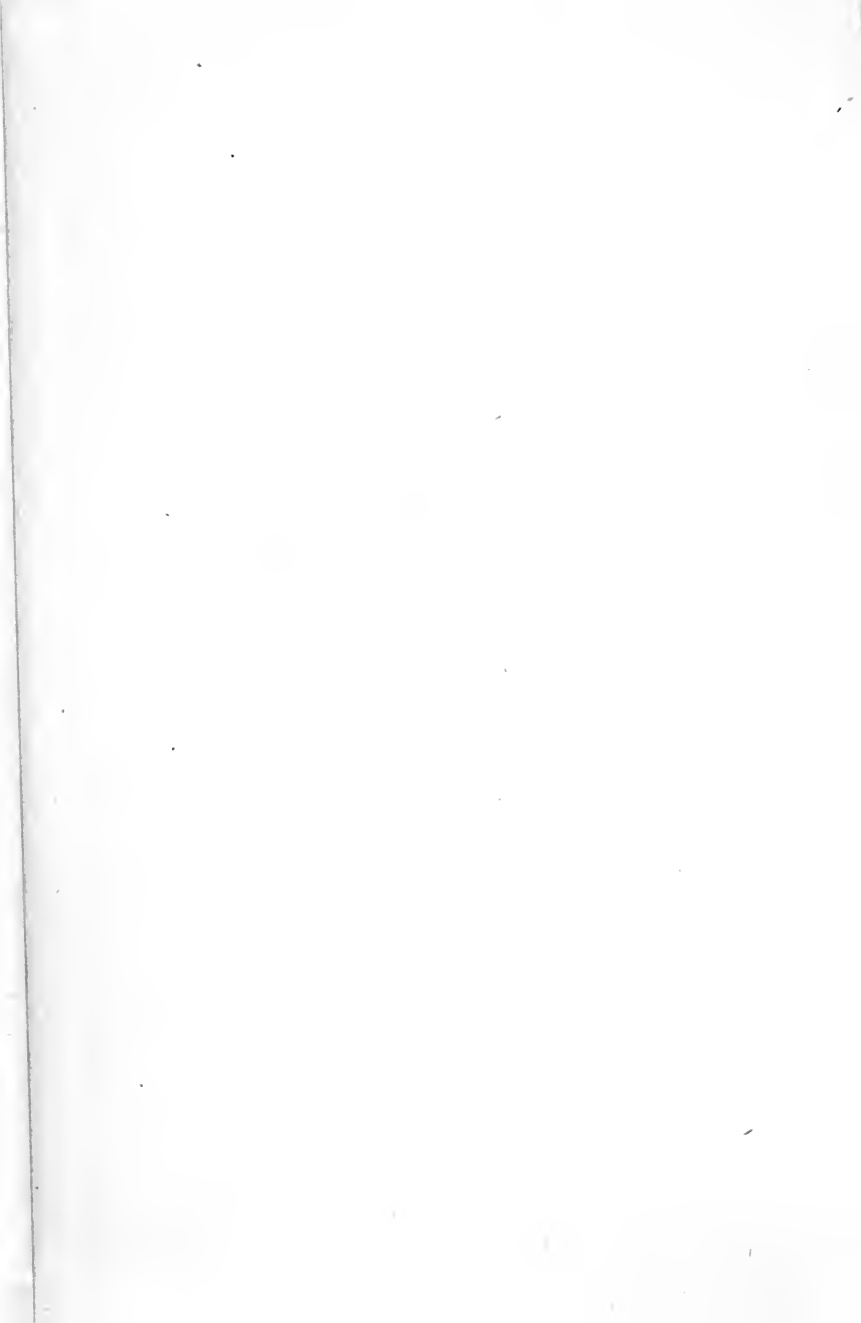
BY ARTHUR HENNING

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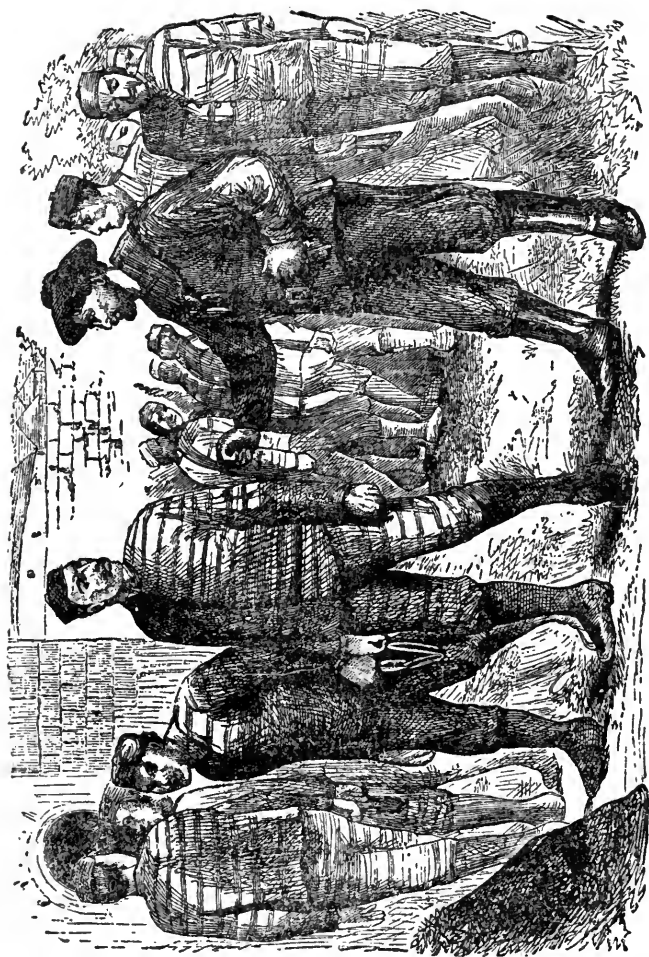


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“ ‘SO YOU ARE TAMED A BIT, ARE YOU?’ SAID THE WARDER.”
Frontispiece. Australia, page 9.

JACK HARKAWAY

AND HIS SON'S

ADVENTURES IN AUSTRALIA

BY

BRACEBRIDGE HEMYNG

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

THE AUTHOR

AND

COMPLETE

CHICAGO:

M. A. DONOHUE & Co.

AMERICAN CIVIL
ENGINEERING
YEARBOOK

M. A. DONOHUE & COMPANY
PRINTERS AND BINDERS
407.429 DEARBORN STREET
CHICAGO

PZ7
H37je

JACK HARKAWAY AND HIS SON'S ADVENTURES IN AUSTRALIA.

CHAPTER I.

IN AUSTRALIA.

WHEN all was landed, the sailors who had rowed Hunston ashore got back into their boat.

"Good-bye, Hunston," said Sam Mason; "you're a gallus black-hearted swab, but I hope you'll mend your ways and do well. Remember your old friends on board——"

Hunston turned sharply round at this.

"Yes," he said, in low, deliberate accents, "I shall not forget. Tell Harkaway that from me. I hope that we may meet again, and when we do, I shall be sure to remember all your kindness—all."

"Do you hear that, men?" exclaimed Sam Mason, "There's a brave chap for you. He waits till the governor is a blessed long way out of hearing before he ventures to threaten. He reminds me of the chap as went on to Highgate Hill to tell the Lord Mayor that he'd pull his nose."

Hunston stood upon the beach, watching the receding boat, and when it was too far for them to be able to distinguish his movements, he sank upon the ground and buried his face in his hands—a prey to the bitterest thoughts.

The shock of solitude was dreadful.

Before he met a human being again, he was destined to go through many desperate adventures.

But now we have to follow the cruise of the "Westward Ho!"

Before there was a new moon, the "Westward Ho!" anchored in Sydney cove.

On the day that our hero and his friends took up their quarters in the chief hotel of Sydney, there was considerable excitement afoot respecting a person who is destined to figure in these pages.

This was a very extraordinary character—a rover, a bush-ranger and bandit, known as Captain Morgan.

Now the charges against this desperado were many and of a serious description.

A price was set upon him, but he contrived to play at hide-and-seek with justice.

Glaring placards were stuck about the hotel even in the dining-hall and in the principal drawing-rooms; in fact everywhere that it was likely to attract the attention of residents and travellers.

"ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD

Will be paid for the body—alive or dead—of the notorious bushranger, bandit, and cattle-stealer, commonly known as Captain Morgan. He stands five feet eight inches and a half in his stockings; is very broad-chested and thickly set. He has light brown hair and beard, full blue eyes, and his expression is usually one of fierce determination. He is possessed of great physical strength, activity, and daring. The chief scenes of his depredations, are the small stations up country, in the neighbourhood of the Macquarie. Morgan is a dead shot. The band he commands is composed of escaped convicts, malefactors, and many of the natives. The above reward of one hundred pounds will be paid to anyone bringing—or causing to be brought—the said Captain Morgan to Government House, Paramatta.

"BY ORDER."

"I hope we are not going to fall foul of this precious robber here," said Harkaway.

"Let us hope not," said Jefferson. "Although it would not surprise me, for it seems to be about our luck."

"Well, what with Monastos and that other ruffian in the mountains, we have had to tackle some desperate characters in the way."

"It has become a regular trade with you, Jack," laughed Harvey.

"I wonder if this Captain Morgan is only half as great a hero as they pretend?" said Harkaway.

"I'll wager that it is some muscular ruffian," said Jefferson.

"And a low, wicked, ugly vagabond," added Harvey.

"Yes."

"But why ugly?" exclaimed Harkaway. "Morgan, I have heard, is a very handsome fellow."

"Well," said Jefferson, thoughtfully, "without knowing any thing of Captain Morgan I should say that there is a dash about him, and that he is not wanting in courage."

"You're right there, sir," said a strange voice, close behind him.

They all turned round.

The speaker was a thick-set, well-proportioned man of a little over the middle-height and dressed in a fashion which set off his muscular proportions to great advantage.

He had on high Jack-boots which came partly up the thigh, blue serge breeches which fitted him tightly and showed the muscles of his thighs above the boots and below the tunic, standing out in big bosses that told their own tale.

He wore a loose sack of red flannel formed into a tunic by a thick, rough hide belt round his waist, from which dangled a long cavalry sword.

His hair was auburn and his beard sandy, with rather a reddish dash in it, while his face, which had once been fair, was deeply bronzed now with exposure to the burning Australian sun.

He had a full blue eye, and seemed born, like Mars, to threaten and command.

"You're right there, sir," repeated the stranger, "Captain Morgan is not wanting in courage."

They turned to survey the speaker, and he bore their scrutiny with the greatest possible coolness.

"You know Captain Morgan, then?" said Jefferson.

"Yes," answered the stranger, smacking his boots carelessly with the handle of his whip. "I have often been close to him."

"Well," said Dick Harvey, pointing to the placard, "I shouldn't care to boast myself of that man's acquaintance."

"I don't boast of it," returned the stranger. "Boasting upon any subject is not a weakness of mine. I have been at very close quarters with Captain Morgan, and I didn't like it, not at all. I can take my own part pretty well as a rule."

"So I should say," answered old Jack, surveying him from top to toe with a critical eye.

"Yes, and yet I did not get any thing more satisfactory from the meeting than this."

He pointed to the mark of a freshly-healed sword-cut upon his right cheek.

"I begin to see," said Dick Harvey. "You must be a member of the mounted police?"

The stranger nodded.

"One of the Sydney Mounted Police stationed up the river. Far?"

"The last station."

"You would know Captain Morgan if you met him?"

"Amongst a million," answered the stranger.

"I suppose he never ventures near to Sydney?" said Jack.

"Indeed he does. That's the reason I am here now."

"Here?"

"Yes; I had to assure myself that it was neither of you gentlemen."

"Neither of us!"

"Yes; Captain Morgan is reported to have said that he meant to have a look at the celebrated Jack Harkaway, and as that celebrity is here somewhere Captain Morgan is like enough to be here. He disguises himself with very remarkable dexterity and his audacity helps him through every thing he tries. Here he is or will be."

"What, here in Sydney!" ejaculated Jefferson, in surprise.

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"You don't know this Captain Morgan. He rather likes thrusting himself in the lion's den. He has said that he would look up, and see Mr. Harkaway, and he'll do it, as sure as I am here."

"I shall believe it," said Harvey, "when we see him here ; not before."

The police officer turned, and gave Dick an odd look.

"You are a sceptical man, and I don't think that you would believe it even then."

"Even when?"

"Not even if you saw Captain Morgan himself before you. Excuse me contradicting you," retorted the officer, "but remember my words."

So saying, he turned to Jack Harkaway.

"You are Mr. Harkaway, I presume?" he said.

Jack bowed.

"That is my name."

The officer gave old Jack a sharp glance, taking in his appearance from top to toe, and reading his expression with the look of a man who was a keen judge of men.

"I suppose there has been a deal of exaggeration in what I have heard of you," said the police officer; "I looked upon it all as a Baron Munchausen tale. It is some gratification to find that there really is such a man as Jack Harkaway. If I can be of any service to you while you are in Sydney, I shall be very glad."

"You are very kind."

A confused murmur of voices was heard at this juncture, which apparently caught the officer's ear.

He bowed to the company generally, and moved to the door.

"If you come across Captain Morgan to-day——" said Dick.

The officer turned, holding the door-handle.

"Yes, what then?"

"Tell him that we have a renowned old bird-catcher here, who will certainly put salt on his tail when the Sydney police have failed."

"Indeed," said the officer, smiling, "and what is the name of your renowned old bird-catcher, sir?"

"The grand old fellow's name is Mole."

"Mole," said the officer; "I shall remember Mole."

"He is not a person anyone would forget who has once seen him," said Harvey; "he is a regular man-killer."

The officer bowed, and passed out.

Now the commotion below had grown still greater, and

barely had the door closed upon the stranger, when another door at the farther end of the room opened, and three men burst in.

"Hullo!" ejaculated Jefferson, "this is rather uncere-
monious."

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the foremost of the three; "there is no time for ceremony. Have you seen him?"

"Who?" asked Harkaway, in wonder.

"Captain Morgan?"

"The devil take Captain Morgan, and fly away with him," returned Harvey, petulantly.

"We haven't seen him nor do we want to."

"But he was here."

"Who—Morgan?"

"Yes, Morgan—the bushranger and murderer."

"You are mistaken," replied Jack Harkaway. "The only person that has been in this room besides ourselves for the last hour, was one of the mounted police."

"A broad-shouldered fellow, with a sandy beard?" exclaimed the new-comer.

"Yes."

"Which way did he go?" demanded the former, excitedly.

"Out at that door."

"Quick," ejaculated the other, fiercely turning to his companions. "Sharp's the word, men, or he'll escape us yet."

The Harkaway party looked at each other half stupefied.

"Is it possible that that was Captain Morgan?" demanded Jefferson.

"Yes."

"Then we have been sold, with a vengeance."

"Sold!" quoth the officer, with some thing like contempt in his tone, "of course you have. Sold!"

He turned to his companions, and exclaimed—

"Off with you—fly! cut off his retreat. Don't fire upon him, unless you find it impossible to stop him otherwise. It will be a feather in our caps to take him alive."

The two men flew back by the door through which they came, and the head or leader rushed to the window.

He dashed it open and leant out eagerly.

"Ha! there he is! We shall be in time. Morgan, yield yourself a prisoner!" he shouted; "yield, or I fire!"

"Take that!" returned a clear, ringing voice.

"Bang!"

"That" was a bullet from a long horse-pistol.

The man at the window ducked just in time, and the bullet smashed a big looking-glass in the room.

"Curse your impudence!" cried the man at the window, furiously. "Here's at you!"

He drew a pistol and fired.

There was heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs below and the sound of a horse at full gallop.

Then a loud, ringing laugh.

"He's off!" cried the man, in bitter vexation. "They'll never get near him. They might as well try to hunt down a flash of lightning as Captain Morgan."

CHAPTER II.

THE HULKS—TRAVELLERS MEET WITH VERY STRANGE BED-FELLOWS—HOW TORO AND BIGAMINI MEET AT THE ANTIPODES—THE RESULTS OF THE ENCOUNTER—SCENES OF CONVICT LIFE AT BOTANY BAY.

UPON a certain day, in the fall of the year——, H. M. S. "Thunderbolt" arrived at one of our chief ports in New South Wales.

The cargo of the "Thunderbolt" was an ugly one—convicts.

Amongst the batch of convicts in question were two men, who, although known by unrecognisable *aliases* now, had at one time been known by names which are familiar to all who have followed the varied fortunes of Jack Harkaway.

One of these was an Italian, of gigantic form, who had been captured by Nabley, the English detective.

The Italian convict was Toro, the giant brigand.

The other convict was an Englishman.

He was a Cockney, who had shown great cunning at his trial, and cross-examined the witnesses for the prosecution with the skill of an Old Bailey barrister.

But do what he could, he failed to get off; and there was Mr. Samuel Perks, *alias* Bigamini, for a matter of seven years.

Now, strange to relate, the other convict, to whom allusion has been made, and Toro, never once met, for the convicts were divided off into gangs, and seldom or never came into contact.

The difference between the two villains was very remarkable.

Toro was bold and defiant throughout.

Bigamini, on the contrary, did all his best to propitiate the chaplain.

"Safe card that," he would say to himself. "Get the right side of the old smiter, and you're safe for a ticket; that's my game, and it's worth a good deal of soft sawder to land it."

He was right in his tactics, as the result showed, for before the voyage was completed, the reverend gentleman whose mission it was to endeavour to bring back those erring men into the right path was quite taken by his show of contrition.

"As you are so truly repentant," he would say, continually, "it will be an easy matter for you to obtain a mitigation of your harsh sentence, and I will exert myself to that end."

"How very good of you, sir," the artful Bigamini would say, in his own peculiarly slimy manner; "too good, too good, sir, for such a wicked sinner as I am."

"Nothing can be too good for a sinner who truly repents," the chaplain would reply at this.

And so, as the time went on, Bigamini had an excellent chance of getting off, as many a scoundrel has got off before, by means of a sneaking, hypocritical air, and professions of good conduct.

Matters, however, were very different with Toro.

The doctor had discovered that the Italian's robust health was giving way under such close confinement, and ordered him to take exercise.

The first day, in spite of all his experience, his temper gave way under the infliction of having a man fixed to him by the arm, and he turned with savage brutality upon the keeper.

"I should like to have your blood!" he said, with a suddenness and vehemence that quite startled the man.

The keeper looked round at his companion, and saw by the vicious expression of his countenance how sincere he was.

"What have I done now?" he said, in a half joking yet earnest manner.

"You are hateful to me," retorted the convict fiercely, "and I should like to have my arms free to show you how I hate you."

"Thank you," returned the keeper coolly; "I suppose you would like your arms free, providing mine were fastened."

Toro's right wrist was fastened by the handcuff to the gaoler's left, and he turned upon him, giving it such a fierce wrench, that it hurt them both.

"Drop that," exclaimed the gaoler, nettled at having his wrist hurt, "or I'll put you on your back."

This brought matters to a crisis at once.

With a fierce imprecation, the Italian now grabbed at the keeper, but the latter caught him by the hand and held him powerless.

"You're an impetuous, imprudent fool," he said, staring the convict in the eyes.

Toro struggled and wrestled to get free, but the keeper was used to rough work of this kind, and he was too much for the Italian giant.

"If you don't keep quiet, you'll get put into irons."

Toro tore frantically at the keeper, and finally maddened with rage and humiliation, struck him.

The keeper then lost his temper, and dashed his fist into the convict's face, with a force that made him see sparks.

At this point, there was a general rush to them.

Keepers and convicts (the latter anxious to curry favour with the folks in authority) fell upon the rebellious prisoner, and bore him down.

"Unlock the handcuff first," said the big keeper.

This done, one of the convicts dropped on the still struggling rebel with his knee upon his chest, and so pinioned him down.

"Keep quiet, will you?" said this zealous convict holding the Italian: "remember," he added, sinking his

voice to a whisper, "remember how Barboni came to grief through temper."

Toro ceased struggling immediately.

"Who?" he faltered.

"Barboni."

"How do you know Barboni?" demanded Toro.

"The same way that I know you, Toro. I kept my eyes open, and I never forget a face when once my blessed peepers have lighted upon it. Oh, dear, no."

"Who are you—what is your name?" demanded the mystified Italian.

"Hush, we are observed. Here, you fellows!" he added aloud, seeing that their hurried conversation was attracting attention; "keep quiet."

The men were coming from the guard-room with a stretcher for Toro's special service.

And now they were close upon them.

"One word more," exclaimed Toro; "tell me your name."

"When you were known as Toro," answered the artful convict, "I was Bigamini. Here I am Mr. Samuel Perks, Esquire, *alias* Smiffins, *alias* Number 4,093, a repentant lag awaiting his ticket."

"What!" cried Toro, "Bigamini?"

"Yes, hush!"

"Is it possible?"

"Of course, and what's more, when you've got over this job—though it'll take you weeks and lots of good behaviour—then I'll show you a thing or two, and instruct you how to make life happy even at stone-breaking on a skilley diet. Not a word more now, but keep your eyes and ears wide open."

The stretcher came up, borne by four stout men.

"Now, you wicked, bad feller," said Number 4,093, with a snuffle; "mend your ways, and be advised by one who has seen his sin. Oh, yea!"

Toro was not to be converted so easily.

A bitter imprecation escaped him as they bore him away strapped to the stretcher, powerless to help himself, hand or foot.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF TWO CONVICTS—THE ARTFUL DODGE—EPISODES
IN THE CARE OF TWO VERY BAD LOTS—HOW THEY WORKED
THE ORACLE.

THE words of the convict No. 4,093 sank deeply in Toro's mind.

Those words, coupled with the rough discipline which his outbreak had brought down upon him, had a most salutary effect.

So, bending his head before the exigencies of his position, the Italian convict became a hypocrite, and uncongenial though the part was, he soon became an adept.

The consequence was that at the expiration of a few weeks he was, by the doctor's request, permitted once more to take open-air exercise.

He longed to see his fellow-convict, No. 4,093.

He longed to make inquiries, but dare not for fear of exciting suspicions, and when night came, back he went to his cell, lowered in spirit, and heartsick with hope deferred.

He passed a feverish night, and when the morning came, he was resolved to question some of the people about Bigamini, but he labored under a certain drawback, and this was that he was ignorant of the name under which Bigamini was convicted.

But to his intense joy, his eye lighted on a figure which recalled Bigamini, and on his back was the number 4,093.

He watched and chose an opportune moment to speak to him when no one was by.

"Bigamini, *caro*," he said, earnestly, "you haven't forgotten me?—Toro!" he added, as the other passed on without heeding him.

Toro saw him go by in despair, and then he ran after him in desperation.

"Hush!" said Bigamini, looking in another direction as he spoke; "we are watched."

This answer shot a gleam of hope into Toro's breast.

Bigamini was not cutting him either through forgetfulness or for other reasons.

He was only waiting for a favourable moment.

Toro followed him up, keeping at a little distance until they had got beyond a small clump of trees.

"Now, tell me, Bigamini," he said, in imploring tones, "when shall I see you? when shall I know if there is to be an end to this life, worse, far worse than a living death?"

"Keep behind me still," said Bigamini, in a subdued voice; "and I will try and answer you."

"I will, I will!" exclaimed the Italian eagerly.

"You must keep down your temper; play hypocrite night and day, and then I will show you how we can work it."

"Tell me what I have to do—say what I can do; anything you say I will gladly do."

"Show patience, bow your head meekly."

"What for?"

"Because it has already got me better grub than you get. The chaplain (good man!), he likes to think that his pious counsels have been successful, and he recommends me to the notice of the governor, who is always much influenced by the words of the clergyman, and that gets me off stone-breaking and oakum-picking, and other hard jobs, and presently——"

"Yes," said Toro, eagerly, "and presently?"

"It may get me a little liberty."

"Hah!"

"And then, if an opportunity offered, who can say what might happen!"

"Who indeed?" exclaimed Toro, chuckling in a subdued manner, lest he should be overheard.

"I might glide—if I saw the way clear—and you might glide too; we should be company. I long to do those little matters in company. It has been my ruin to be too fond of company," added No. 4,093, woefully. "for I took a wife or two too many because of this weakness."

"You got transported for bigamy?" said Toro.

The other groaned.

Alas, alas!

"A dreadful wicked thing, Mr. Toro," said he, with a

sigh and a hypocritical smirk which he had contracted since he had been—as he expressed it—“dodging the parson;” “the voyage in their transports is by no means transports of delight.”

* * * * *

The good chaplain consulted with Bigamini about the repentant sinner in whom he, Bigamini, appeared to take such interest.

“Does he seem to be penetrated with the gravity of his position?” the reverend gentleman would constantly inquire of Bigamini.

To this the latter was careful to reply, for he knew that the least extravagance on his part would do more harm than good to the cause in view.

“He is becoming gradually more and more open to reason, sir,” Bigamini would reply, hanging his head, “But I can’t say in fairness that he is a convert.”

“Patience, patience,” the worthy gentleman would reply; “we must not hope to do it all at once. A good work is not to be accomplished without trouble, patience, and perseverance, my good man.”

“No, sir, no,” quoth No. 4,093, meekly; “I wish I could follow the good example which you set me.”

“Ah, my friend,” said the clergyman; “I am only an erring man like yourself—a weak worm. I sin hourly. I strive to keep in the right but narrow path, and frequently I strive in vain.”

In the end, the convict No. 4,093 gave it as his opinion to the chaplain that the Italian was growing convinced of the error of his ways, and would be reasonable if he were but permitted to take exercise with the rest of the convicts.

“I am afraid that the governor will rather oppose that,” said the chaplain, “after his violent conduct with the warder that day.”

“No wonder, sir,” returned Bigamini.

“He is a very dangerous character, I fear——”

“He was.”

“Do you think that there is no longer any danger?”

“None, sir.”

“Well, well,” said the reverend gentleman, “I will see what can be done.”

“My only desire, sir,” said Bigamini, “is to impart to

him some of those words of hope, those crumbs of comfort which I have gleaned from you—to save an erring soul, if I can.”

* * * * *

“I have obtained permission of the governor,” said the chaplain, a day or two after the foregoing conversation; “but it is accompanied by certain irksome conditions.”

Bigamini smiled in what he deemed a sweet and saintly manner.

“Oh, sir, we must be thankful for small mercies,” he said, with a snuffle.

“You must go out in twos,” said the chaplain, “coupled.”

“Like dogs——”

“Hush.”

“Oh, sir, I don’t complain. I am only too glad to be humbled as low as they will. I have sinned, and as you truly say, I must expiate my fault.”

The chaplain bowed his head in humility.

Bigamini clenched his hand tightly and muttered to himself—

“If I had you alone, I should feel joy in strangling you with these hands.”

The chaplain sighed. But he had not overheard the muttered remark of the convict.

“How are we to go?” asked Bigamini, with some thing like impatience in his tone, in spite of his eagerness to suppress it.

The chaplain took a written order from his pocket and read it aloud—

“Number 4,093 is to accompany Number 4,112, handcuffed together, the right wrist of Number 4,112 to the left of Number 4,093.”

Bigamini quickened his hearing.

“Are we to be marched along by a driver, like the unhappy negroes?”

“No, no; that humiliation is spared you.”

“I do not ask it, sir. It is meet that I should suffer all the degradation of my sentence.”

“Hush!” said the chaplain, pressing the convict’s hand with emotion.

* * * * *

“Well,” muttered Number 4,093, to himself, as the

good chaplain disappeared, "as an 'umbug, I feel that I'm a gem of the first water. They're few and far between as can 'old a candle to me. I do it so regular, right-down real, too, and the water comes to my blessed peepers in the affectin' parts. I don't wonder as I takes in the old devil-dodger. Why, I reg'lar deceives myself at times, s'elp me Robert!"

* * * * *

The roll was called over, and the convicts were paraded for exercise.

In twos or threes, handcuffed or chained together, they came along the parade-ground, passed in revision by several of the officers of the settlement.

And foremost amongst them was the big burly warder to whom the rebellious Toro had been chained upon the last occasion of his appearance in public.

He looked hard at Toro and strode up to him.

"So you're tamed down a bit, are you?" he said.

Toro was silent.

"I thought you would alter your tune, you mad fool. Those capers aren't to be tried on here. You have learnt that at last."

The Italian quivered from head to foot with rage suppressed.

A warning jerk from Number 4,093 upon his wrist kept one great fact before him.

Only an affectation of humility could help him now.

The law was too strong for him here.

He was in the toils and he must submit.

"It was lucky for you that they came and dragged you away," pursued the big warder, tauntingly; "for bad as what you got was, it is nothing to what I should have given you myself."

"Hah!"

"Quiet!" growled Number, 4,093, in an undertone.

"I had to chastise a rough like you once," said the gaoler, noting the torture he was inflicting upon the convict with considerable satisfaction.

"I wish I had you alone somewhere, with these cursed things off my wrists," muttered Toro to himself.

"Quiet," hissed Bigamini. "Don't you see his game?"

"Curse him!" muttered the Italian.

"Only once," continued the big warder. "He did not

want talking to again. He's in the hospital now, and has been ever since ; and as for you, if they had but left you alone in my care, I would have whipped you until you would have crawled and fawned at my feet like a well-licked hound."

The word was given to march.

Number 4,093 glanced up at his companion.

Number 4,112 was bleeding profusely at the mouth.

He had bitten his lip through.

All his sufferings were as nothing compared to what he had to go through, in listening to the taunts of the tantalising gaoler.

"Curse you ! curse you !" he kept muttering ; "if ever I get you alone, I'll strangle you."

"Swaller it, swaller it, Toro," whispered his comrade in the gang ; "swaller it, and you'll laugh last."

Toro grunted.

"Perhaps."

"Very much so ; look at them green fields over there —look at that 'ere river, and the 'ills, and the walleys."

"Yes," said Toro, bitterly ; "and look at these."

He lifted his right wrist, and his companion's left, pointing in bitterness to the iron gyves.

"Well," said Bigamini ; "what of that ?"

"What's the use of green fields with these on ?"

"I can slip 'em."

"How ? They never leave you the least thing to make use of ; why, the very spoon we eat their accursed poison out of, is chained down to the table."

"Shall I tell you a secret ?" said Bigamini, looking about him nervously.

Toro's curiosity was excited by the other's manner.

"Yes ; what is it ?"

"I've found a old rusty nail in my caboose, and I've hid it away."

"What rubbish is this you are talking ?" said Toro, angrily ; "what is the use of that ?"

Number 4,093 smiled with a pitying expression.

"Hinnercent !" he said ; "teething lambkin. Why, there ain't a blessed lock in all London, from a Bramah to a Chubb, but I can pick with a nail ; and do you think as I'm to be beat by a pair of regglelation darbies at the antypoads ? Get on with you."

Toro brightened up at this.

"Bravo!"

"Very much bravo."

"You are a genius, Bigamini, in your way."

"It all comes of being used to the artful line," said 4,093, modestly. "Why, when first I used to do the decayed mechanic outside the pubs on Saturday nights, I felt quite nervis, and the first fit I had in the street, I did it so bad, that the crusher—who was only a green hand himself—browned at once to my game.

"'Come now,' says he; 'keep moving.'"

"Then he gives me a clump with his mutton fist.

"'Spit out yer mottle,' says he, and gives me another clump; whereupon I glode."

Toro smiled.

"I suppose it has its advantages," he said, endeavouring to appear gracious to his companion, to whom he looked now for liberty; "but for my part, I think, I would sooner jump into the sea than live like that."

Number 4,093 smiled.

"You always was give so to the dangerous line," he said; "my notion is safety. I earnt a honest living for years, with the broken-crock fake."

Toro stared.

"The what?"

"The broken-crock fake; you don't know that? Thought not. Don't want much capital neither to work it; only a sickly mug, you see."

"You did well then?"

"Yes, I did so. I found a basket in Covent Garden Market, when the salesman wasn't looking, and I filled it with broken crocks."

"Crocks?"

"Earthenware, chaney, and glass, old broken things I took off dust-eaps. This load you carries on your 'ead, until you come to a quiet spot in a nice retired street, when you pretend to slip; down you goes, crocks and all; out comes the ladies, sympathising dears, and sees you weeping copious over your basket, and, as a rule, they ask the value of your basket of earthenware. You says that it's a choice lot of goods you had just bought for trading honest, and in eight cases out of ten, they subscribes.

Well, the worst I ever did, was half a wheel, and that in a comparative poor neighbourhood."

"Half a wheel?"

"Two-an'-six."

"I see; and why did you quit such an admirable calling?" demanded Toro.

"I'll tell you," answered Bigamini, looking very straight. "I forgot one day, and worked in the same street twice in the same week. A young woman pops out of the corner house, which I thought it was a chance, for I goes down ter with the sex as a rule. I was on my blessed mettle then, and meant landing a thick un at least, an' so as I laid down on my back in the middle of the broken crocks, I thought I'd throw in a fit as well, just to work the extra sympathies.

"The young gal, with the yaller 'air and the blue eyes, looked on curious-like, but never offers so much as a tanner. A gent comes up, and says he—'Poor fellar, here's half a crown for you.' I 'eld up my 'and for it, when the gal drags his hand back. 'Don't give nothing,' says she, 'it's all a trick; I've seen him do it several times. The crockeryware is already broken.' 'The wagabone,' says the toff, 'we'll run 'im in,' and they did it, too; and the worst was that while I was up before the beak, I was recognised by a peeler as a party that was wanted for another job, and, the beasts, that's why you see me here now."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LONE WANDERER IN THE DESERT—HOPES, FEARS, AND PERILS—THE SAVAGES' CAMP.

WE shift the scene once more.

In a lone and desolate tract of the country, a solitary wanderer was slowly dragging his weary course along.

A miserable man, with pale, careworn cheeks and deeply-sunken eyes, who laboured painfully at every step.

His garments hung in rags about his shrunken form, and the wretched remnants of what were once upon a time jack-boots, were now kept upon his feet by means of strings or thongs cut out of thick hide.

Many and many a weary mile had he wandered on without seeing the face or form of a human being.

And when the sense of his desolation and loneliness fell upon him he passed through a series of sensations which pen cannot even faintly describe.

He crawled along as far as he was able, until one day he sank exhausted by the wayside, and he hoped that he was going to die.

"Most men are afraid to die," he thought to himself, "and here am I ready to rejoice could I know that this hour was to be my last on earth. Will it never end?"

Ah, yes!

Perhaps when he least expected it.

Perhaps the awful moment would come when he would have changed his frame of mind.

He had but one subject constantly on his mind.

Death!

Now his thoughts flew upward, and he asked himself if he had sinned so deeply as to beyond all hope of redemption.

"Is it possible that there is no hope whatever for such a wretch as me? Have I offended so deeply," he asked, with upturned eyes, "that I am lost for ever and ever? No, no, no; a hundred times no! I will not believe it; it would be a calumny upon Heaven to say it!"

Strange words these for such a man as Hunston.

He ventured to breathe a prayer.

As the old familiar words, that in his childhood he had first learnt to utter, kneeling in his mother's lap, passed his lips, he sank upon his knees, and cried aloud for mercy.

Scenes of his innocent boyhood flashed in rapid succession through his mind, and the feelings evoked sent the tears to his eyes, and in piteous accents he prayed to be allowed to die.

And praying thus, he sank gradually down and dropped, without intending it, into a profound sleep.

* * * * *

He must have slept for several hours, for when he opened his eyes, the sun was sinking rapidly below the horizon.

Considerably refreshed by the rest, he arose and stretched himself out.

"The best sleep I have had for many a day," he ex-

claimed—"many a day—aye, for many a week, many a month, I might——"

He paused. Hark!

"What's that?"

A distant echo of a blast upon a horn.

He looked anxiously about him, and presently discerned, far away, a black mass of moving objects, the first glimpse of which set his heart throbbing.

Instinctively, he guessed that it was a mob of human beings.

He watched the black, waving mass intently for a considerable time.

Presently, having assured himself that they were coming in that direction, he began to look about him for a hiding-place.

"That clump of trees will do for me," he said.

So off he ran as fast as his legs would carry him, and having picked out a roosting-place, up he clambered, and perched so as to be able to take observations while remaining unseen himself.

"They're blacks!"

They were indeed.

A whole clan of the aborigines, men, women and children.

The appearance of these people was a surprise to Hunston, for he had seen several of the natives of New Zealand, the Maories, and they were as fine specimens of manhood as the earth can show.

These Australians were the very reverse.

Ugly, ungainly figures—hideous flat faces, smeared with horrible pigments, which made them look like Chinese idols more than human beings.

Hunston had heard of these people, as far as character went.

He knew that their chief characteristics were cruelty and vindictiveness.

Their enmity to the whites was fierce and undying.

"If I show myself, I am lost here," thought Hunston.

He was right. His life would not be worth five minutes' purchase.

"They're coming here."

Right once more.

Straight to that clump of trees they marched, yelling

discordantly as they came, throwing up their arms, and capering about in the most alarming fashion.

Under the shade of the leafy boughs they pitched their camp.

"I am lost!" murmured Hunston.

His heart sank, and he was filled with fears of death!

He, who for weeks past, had been longing for it as the end to all his woes.

CHAPTER V.

WHEREIN TWO OLD FOES MEET FACE TO FACE—"THE DOGS
THAT THEY HUNT THE NIGGERS WITH."

THE HARKAWAYS made up their minds to travel up the country, beyond the last station upon the big river.

"We have exhausted every possible style of locomotion," said old Jack, when they were discussing the particulars of the project, "rail, boat, and horseback, but it will be a new sensation to voyage by caravan."

"So it will."

"We can have a saddle-horse or two for those who wish to distinguish themselves before the ladies."

"Mr. Mole, for instance," suggested Dick.

The old gentleman turned sharply round.

"Not so much of your chaff, Mr. Harvey, if you please," said he; "I have shown to as good advantage in the saddle as most people here present."

Old Jack stared again.

Lying old rascal as he knew Mole was, he did not think that he would venture such a cram as this in their presence; but young Jack was present, and he liked old Mole's romancing too well to have his reminiscences nipped in the bud.

"You had a good seat, Mr. Mole?" he said, innocently.

Mr. Mole smiled in a pitying manner.

"You haven't heard much about horses at your early period of life, my dear Jack," he said, "or the name of Mole would have sounded 'familiar in your ears as household words,' as the poet says, in connection with the equine race."

"You surprise me," said Harvey, pretending to take it all in.

"I had a pony once that would take a five-barred gate——"

"For supper?" suggested Dick.

"No, sir, at a leap."

"And where would it take the five-barred gate to?" demanded Harvey.

"I mean clear it."

"Clear it!" repeated Dick. "Why, you talk of a pony as if it were a cask of wine; and what is the object of clearing a pony?"

"Rubbish!" cried Mr. Mole, furiously.

"What a singular object," said the imperturbable Dick.

"And do you employ white of eggs or steel filings?"

"Bah!" yelled Mole, savagely, while the rest of the company were trying vainly to suppress their mirth; "you pretend not to believe it, but you know well how true it is, for you remember the pony well."

"Of course I do," exclaimed Dick, "well, indeed; it was a native of Jerusalem."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the listeners.

And this put an end to Mr. Mole's anecdote.

* * * * *

The preparations made for the new journey were necessarily long and costly.

They had eight large waggons horsed with stout teams and well provisioned.

They had to hire several servants, and for these, according to custom, they went to the prison, where there are always a number of men on hire amongst the discharged convicts or men who by good conduct have earned their tickets of leave, and amongst the number were two in whom we take a certain interest.

"No. 4,093!" was called out by one of the warders attending upon the chaplain.

"Here, sir."

And No. 4,093 marched meekly out, looking the very picture of innocence—according to a Botany Bay point of view.

"4,112."

"Here."

"That's a big, fine fellow," said Harkaway, as the last called stepped forth.

"What offence was he sent here for?" asked Harvey.

The registers were searched, and the answer brought.

"Robbery from the person with great violence."

"Humph!" said Jefferson, "it's rather a dangerous fellow to have about one. I think that we could dispense with him."

No. 4,112 heard it, and he scowled at the speaker.

"Did you notice that?" said Jefferson, eagerly.

"What?"

"His look."

"Not particularly," replied Harkaway.

"It was a familiar look, I thought," said Jefferson, reflectively.

"How so?"

Jefferson made no reply for awhile, but walked thoughtfully away.

"I know that I have seen that face somewhere," he kept muttering to himself; "but where—where?"

It was, however, small wonder that he could not recall the face.

Those men were disguised so effectually by the prison barbers, and by the convict's flannel garb, that few persons could have traced any resemblance to those men as they appeared before their trials.

4,112 had worn his hair long and bushy, and beard of raven blackness.

Now, when this man was closely cropped and had his beard and moustache shaved off, it will be readily understood why he was effectually disguised.

The other convict, No. 4,093, walked after him.

"That big fellow doesn't appear to be altogether reformed," said Jefferson, to the chaplain.

"There is a hidden devil in his eye," added Dick.

"I hope not," said the worthy chaplain.

"I am pretty sure of it," said Jefferson.

"I will go after him to see what it means," said the chaplain.

* * * * *

The two convicts walked away, No. 4,112 looking as black as thunder.

His expression now would have condemned him anywhere.

No. 4,093 was more careful—more guarded in his manner.

His experience in playing the “artful dodge,” as he so significantly termed it, had led him to train his expression so as to be all things to all men.

Coming up with his fellow-prisoner, he gave a sharp glance about him to ascertain that they were out of ear-shot, and then he said—

“Toro, my pippin, you’ve made a nice mess of it.”

“Bah!”

“What do you mean by showing your temper to the strangers?”

Toro stared.

“Strangers?”

“Yes, those people.”

“Is it possible you don’t remember?”

“What?”

“Those faces.”

“I don’t see how I can remember people that I never saw before in all my life.”

The Italian convict burst out laughing.

“Well, well, Bigamini,” he cried, laughing still, “I gave you credit for a better memory.”

“Who the deuce are they? Why don’t you tell me at once?”

“Don’t you know the name of Jack Harkaway?”

“Who?”

Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, he could not have looked more startled.

Yet, no sooner was the name pronounced, than he remembered all the faces well.

He had not expected to see any of that party there—indeed, his thoughts had been anywhere but upon the Harkaways—else he might have recognised them.

You will bear in mind, too, that he had not seen the Harkaways so lately as Toro had.

“It gives me quite a turn,” said Bigamini.

“Why?”

“Why! why, couldn’t they make it precious hot for us both?”

“Of course they could,” returned Toro; “but I think they will never know us. The only course is to avoid them, for did they but say half a word to the governor

about all we have done in various parts of the world, we should never have half a chance at a ticket."

Number 4,093 pulled the wryest possible face.

"Dear, dear Toro," he exclaimed, ready to weep. "After all my trouble too."

Toro grinned.

But his grin was savage, and it made his companion jump back.

"No snivelling here, you watering-pot," he said, "or I'll give you something——"

"Hush!"

"What is it?"

"The chaplain."

"Where?"

"Behind us."

Immediately the two convicts fell into their old parts of the reformed convicts.

The chaplain approached them slowly.

"My friends," he said, gently, "I fear you have not the strength to wrestle with evil inclinations. Why did you leave so abruptly?"

"He is very sorry now, sir," said Number 4,093.

"Why did you leave?"

"To follow him," said Bigamini; "to help him if I could with a word of hope and comfort. That, sir, was my only desire."

The meekness with which this was uttered, produced the desired effect upon the good man.

He patted Number 4,093 encouragingly upon the shoulder.

"You are a good fellow," he said. "I hope that your reward may come soon."

And Number 4,093 shook his head meekly as if deprecating the compliment.

"My brother in sin and misfortune," he said, indicating Toro by a gesture, "knew those people."

Toro gave a start.

"Basta, basta!" he exclaimed, in alarm.

But Bigamini never heeded his warning.

"Knew the visitors?" said the chaplain.

"Yes."

"No, no," ejaculated Number 4,112; "he is mistaken, sir. I do not say that——"

The chaplain looked from one to the other inquiringly.

"He does not care to own it, sir," said Number 4,093, "but it's the truth. That man was his worst enemy. He has pursued him remorselessly through life. His great riches have enabled him to dispose pretty much as he liked of his enemies, my unhappy brother amongst the rest."

"Never!"

"It is true, sir."

The clergyman looked greatly shocked.

"It is very sad, but I will seek them, and reason with them, and perhaps when they know your name, my good friend——"

Toro gave a savage side glance at Bigamini.

Yet Bigamini did not appear to be much alarmed.

"You must not, sir," said he to the chaplain; "they are cruel, and although they would speak fairly to your face, they would be sure to work against him in secret."

"But——"

"Oh, sir, pray do not risk it as an experiment, for you would be sure to ruin him. Promise him, sir, pray."

"Well, well, as that is the case," responded the reverend gentleman, "I will promise."

"Thanks, oh, thanks, sir. Heaven bless you."

The clergyman turned away considerably affected, and strolled thoughtfully out of hearing.

"What an impatient fellow you are," said Bigamini.

"You alarmed me."

"But there was no other explanation for it, don't you see? He's soft on certain questions, but the parson isn't altogether a fool."

"Do you think you may rely upon his silence?"

"Certain."

Now they came to the boundary of the exercise ground, which adjoined the road, and just as they arrived here, they were greeted by the deep baying of dogs.

A moment more and two men of colour came past, each holding a pair of strong and fierce-looking blood-hounds.

"Fine dogs, mister," said Bigamini.

"Very fine," responded one of the darkeys.

"They hunt the niggers with them across the Atlantic," said Toro, brutally.

One of the darkeys, who was once known as Julius Cæsar Augustus Hannibal Jex, and who curiously enough

was introduced to these pages on a rumpus with the convict Number 4,112, turned sharply upon the speaker.

"Mind they ain't put on your trail, mister gaol-bird," he said, viciously; "they mightn't find a convict's flesh as dainty as a nigger's, but I'se blessed if dey wouldn't gnaw proper."

Toro made a savage retort, and would have committed himself imprudently had not Bigamini taken him by the arm, and dragged him away.

"Don't be quite so familiar, Bigamini," growled Toro.

"Hush, don't you see?"

Toro looked anxiously about him at this.

"What, the guard coming?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Don't you recognise those two niggers?"

"No—yes, of course, they must be Harkaway's black devils; I shouldn't have remembered them. Niggers and babies always appear exactly alike to me."

He turned round to look at the black men Sunday and Monday, for of course it was our faithful old friends whom the convicts had recognised, and he saw that Sunday was pointing him out to his companion.

"Come away, Bigamini," exclaimed Toro, anxiously.

"We are recognised by those devils. Come along."

"I don't think so."

"Don't you? Look back; see, they are pointing to us still."

They were too.

The pair of darkeys had not been able to fathom the mysteriously familiar appearance of the convicts, but they were getting upon the scent.

"Confound them," ejaculated Toro, impetuously. "I should like to see them——"

"I know," interrupted Bigamini, impatiently. "But don't waste time in curses. This is the moment for action not words."

It was in truth a serious job for the convicts, for reasons that the reader can not fail to appreciate.

"Something must be done, and that promptly too."

"True, for if they have not recognised us to-day, they will, and once let all the truth be known, you may look to the full term of your sentence as a certainty."

"Yes, and fresh warrants to be handed to you the day you step out of prison."

Harkaway, or any of his party, knew many unpleasant little incidents connected with the careers of Number 4,093 and Number 4,112, which would show them up in so much worse light than could have been supposed.

If they remained here, they risked discovery daily.

Harkaway would be certain to return to the place for the domestics and labouring men that he was to take upon the chaplain's recommendation to his new settlement up the country.

* * * * *

"Bigamini," exclaimed Toro, stopping suddenly, "we must bolt."

Number 4,093 grinned.

"When?"

"To-night. I don't say it will be easy; all I say is that it will have to be done. If we are recognised, we are lost. Better to risk all and bolt."

"Very good," answered Number 4,093. "I'm agreed."

"When you hear the bell toll two," said Toro, "glide to the dormitory window; you will find it open."

"Open?"

Toro nodded.

"It is always barred."

"It will not be to-night, for I have removed the screws of the bar. It comes out bodily, you see," he added, significantly, "and may be handy in case of anyone getting in our way."

Bigamini grew slightly alarmed.

"No violence," he said.

"I shall be prudent; only let 'em beware of stopping us, that's all."

The look of fierce menace in his face made Bigamini tremble, and for a moment he half regretted being concerned in this job.

However, it is certain that he feared Toro more than anything or anyone else.

He dared not retreat.

* * * * *

All was silent in the convict dormitory.

At either end of the long chamber in which the convicts slept were warders dozing in their chairs.

But it was cat-like sleep, and at their right hands, were bell-pulls, the lightest touch of which would alarm the whole settlement.

No easy matter therefore for a prisoner to escape.

The deep-toned bell of the prison tolled two sonorous notes.

A faint rustling might be heard in the dormitory, and two dark forms glided like phantoms to the window.

The shutter was barred heavily, and upon the right the bar was fixed to the staples by a padlock, of which each warder kept a key.

But the padlock and the staples were all alike useless.

The bar came away bodily.

The window was pushed gently open, and each of the two men threw a leg over prior to dropping down.

Suddenly a sound was heard, which startled them not a little.

The tramping of military men.

"Hush!"

"What now?"

"They are going to relieve guard."

"Quiet."

The marching of the soldiers grew nearer and nearer, until it ended beneath the window.

Immediately below them was a sentry-box, and the sentinel there was to be removed.

The challenge of the officer of the watch was heard distinctly.

The guard was changed.

The soldiers marched off, and the regular tramping soon died away in the distance.

"Now's our chance; for life or death," cried Toro.

"Quickly," said the other, looking pale, and trembling with fear.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT—THE SENTRY BAGGED—ALARMING SOUNDS—HUNTED
BY BLOOD-HOUNDS.

Now the spot where the two convicts escaped from the window was close over the sentry-box.

Toro being less agile than his companion, he dropped fairly upon the top of the box, and the weight of his huge body made it sway forward.

Judge then of the amazement of the sentry who had only just been placed there.

The tramp of the patrol was just dying in the distance, when down flopped a man like magic before his box, and almost at the same instant the sentry received a shock, and the box was toppled over.

Down it fell with a crash, trapping the sentry in a way that was comical in the extreme, or it would have been had it been a trifle less alarming.

Toro rolled upon the ground, and Bigamini looked half dead with fright.

"Oh, golly," he moaned; "it's all up."

Toro scrambled up.

"Don't be a fool," he said, savagely. "He's safe. I'm more damaged than anyone, and I can walk, you see."

"Look."

"Where?"

"His gun."

Bigamini pointed to the barrel of the sentry's musket, which was projected beneath the edge of the sentry-box, and as it was moving backwards and forwards, there was every reason to suppose that the sentinel, like themselves, was a good deal more frightened than hurt.

"Hush!" exclaimed Toro, warningly, "we must have that or his life."

"The gun?"

"Yes."

"Gently does it," said Bigamini.

Toro stooped, and made a grab at the barrel of the gun.

But just as he got hold of it, it rattled in his grasp, and a loud explosion followed.



"THE FRIGHT OF THE TWO CONVICTS WAS SOMETHING GREAT"

It had gone off!

The fright of the two convicts at this was something great.

During the momentary stillness that reigned immediately after the explosion, they looked about them eagerly, expecting to be pounced upon at once.

But an alarm is not always so quickly taken.

It required some few minutes for the prison authorities to realise the full significance of the noise.

But when they did get some insight into the events which had occurred, there was a general alarm created.

Then the alarm-bell was rung.

There were guns firing, and a general excitement, while an elaborate search was made, for they could not at once discover whence the mischief came.

Thus it fell out that before they were upon the scent, the fugitive convicts, Numbers, 4,093 and 4,112, were far off.

"We must keep to the river," said Bigamini, "and we are saved."

"Don't be too sanguine as yet," responded Toro.

"Do you think we shall be taken?" demanded Bigamini, in trembling accents.

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"Silence, fool!" ejaculated the Italian, savagely. "Don't worry me. If you do any thing that may endanger us, I shall think nothing of putting you out of the way."

"Ugh!"

Bigamini knew his companion of old.

He knew too well that Toro was not the man to hesitate, even at murder.

He would look upon "removing" him—Bigamini—from his path with as much coolness as disposing of an enemy.

This was not a pleasant companion, truly.

* * * * *

"This way. Follow me closely," exclaimed Toro.

"Consider me there," responded Bigamini.

By this time the pursuit had grown unpleasantly hot, and they speedily realised one important fact.

They must throw the pursuers off the track before day-break, or they would be lost.

Once let them get an idea of their route and good-bye to their chance of safety.

The night was dark, and progress difficult.

But Toro consoled himself for this on reflecting that it made the pursuit equally difficult.

Their only object was to gain the river.

Once there, they kept along as close to the bank as they could.

Toro led, and he went the pace in his dashing, fearless way, while Bigamini followed him as closely as his fears would allow him, for the danger of falling into the river was by no means inconsiderable.

Several miles of ground were covered in this way, until Toro, who led some distance ahead of his squeamish comrade, was suddenly brought to a standstill by a cry of pain and terror proceeding from Bigamini.

"Hold your noise, you idiot!" he exclaimed, savagely. "Do you want to bring them down upon us?"

"Oho!"

"Where are you?"

"Here."

"How far?"

"Come and lend us a hand, like a good pal. I've stuck in an 'ole, and damaged one of my legs, I think."

A fresh cry of pain, louder even than the first, brought the Italian up to him with a run.

He found that Bigamini had slipped upon the bank, where there was a sudden and steep declivity, and that although a good deal more frightened than hurt, yet he had really sustained some damage.

"Do you think you have broken your leg?" demanded Toro, stretching over to him.

"Yes," answered Bigamini, eagerly, for he thought to elicit a word of sympathy from his boorish comrade.

"If that's the case, you are no good for this job."

"Wuss luck!" groaned the convict, piteously.

"Then I'll tell you what I had better do for you."

"Yes, yes," said Bigamini, eagerly, "what, old pal?"

"I had better drop you into the water. I don't want you left there howling, for you'll put them upon the scent; and I don't want that. So here you go to the bottom of the river."

"Don't be a brute," cried the convict, awfully frightened at this; "lend us a hand and pull me up."

Toro stretched out and succeeded in dragging his companion up on to *terra firma*.

The march was resumed; Bigamini being only a slight limp the worse for his fall, until Toro decided to rest for the night.

"We shall be fresher after a little sleep," said he, "and they'll never get as far as here to-night."

* * * * *

Morning dawned and found the two escaped convicts fast asleep upon their backs, with the early sun pouring its fiery rays on to their faces.

But they were so thoroughly done up by their exertions of the previous day, that they slept like tops notwithstanding.

After a certain time Toro opened his eyes.

He stared about him, and then he started as a distant sound struck on his ear.

Evidently the sounds alarmed him.

At first he sat upright and listened intently, and then down he stretched upon the ground and listened with his ear to the earth.

An expression of alarm flitted across his countenance.

Yet we must give him the credit to acknowledge that it was only momentary, and was speedily replaced by a look of settled resolution.

"Bigamini!" he exclaimed, kicking his companion with a very unpleasant vigour.

"Hullo!"

"Get up."

"Eh! any thing wrong?"

"Yes," answered Toro, sharply; "very wrong indeed."

His manner helped as much as the kick to arouse his companion.

"What can it be, Toro?" he exclaimed, an uneasy feeling stealing over him.

"Listen," was Toro's reply.

Bigamini obeyed, and when he caught the sound that had aroused Toro so thoroughly, he turned pale.

"It's dogs!"

Toro nodded.

"Yes."

"Hounds!"

"That's it," answered Toro in the same manner. "Bloodhounds, and on our track, too. What do you think of that, Bigamini?"

The convict's lips grew livid with fear.

"Oh, Toro, Toro," he faltered, "you are never going to give in. You won't bottle up."

"What?"

"Don't be violent. I say you will fight it out, won't you? You ain't a-going to cry peccavi yet awhile, are you?"

"I am going to kill you, perhaps," answered Toro, in a voice of calm, which thrilled his companion most unpleasantly.

"Oho!"

"Get up."

"I will, I will," shrieked Bigamini, springing to his feet as Toro helped him with a kick.

"Follow me."

"Yes, yes."

They made their way on as fast as they could, but at every stride the deep baying of the hounds sounded nearer and nearer.

They were gaining upon the fugitives rapidly.

It was serious now.

The two convicts struggled on at a desperate rate.

Yet what could they do in a race with those fierce, four-footed beasts?

"They will tear us piecemeal," exclaimed Bigamini, "if once they come up with us."

"There's no fear of that," answered Toro; "they are only put on the track to guide our pursuers by their keen scent. On with you."

"Oh!"

"Cur that you are; the dogs are held in."

Bigamini looked round over his shoulder and gave a cry, or rather a gasp, of fright.

"Look."

Toro turned sharply round, and there, a hundred yards behind them, were four bloodhounds bounding along with their heads to the ground.

They were alone.

Not a human soul in sight.

"They have followed the trail," said Toro rather thickly, "and the keepers have not been able to keep up."

"We are lost then," ejaculated Bigamini.

"No, no," exclaimed Toro, "not lost, though would to goodness we had a weapon each."

* * * * *

They looked anxiously about them.

Nearer and nearer grew the baying of the dogs.

Nearer and nearer every minute they approached.

Minutes were precious now indeed.

Minutes—aye, seconds.

"It's all over with this poor child," cried Bigamini, in despair.

"Not yet," exclaimed Toro ; "there's the river."

"The river?"

"Aye; can you swim?"

"Like a stone."

"No matter. Jump in, I'll help you across."

"Ugh!"

It was a sad alternative, but Bigamini was a bit of philosopher.

"Better be drowned than made into dogs' meat," he groaned.

And in he plunged.

As they struck the water, the four bloodhounds ran sniffing up to the bank of the river.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF DANGER—ON THE MARCH—A TYRANT AND HIS VICTIM—
THE BUSHRANGERS—CONGENIAL SPIRITS—CAPTAIN MORGAN.

Toro rose to the surface and looked about him.

Bigamini was splashing and floundering about, trying to cry out in fright, but half choked with the water he had swallowed.

"Strike out."

Bigamini heard it, and he obeyed.

Yes, he obeyed it too much ; for he struck out at such a rate that down he went.

"Fool!" cried Toro.

The bloodhounds stood sniffing about the bank of the river, looking wistfully at their destined prey, but they did not like taking the water.

They wanted their masters there to encourage them.

The hounds had gained upon them, solely because they had got free from the guidance of their masters; yet now, they were useless in the absence of their masters.

Toro, who was pretty well versed in the nature of these fierce brutes, saw it all, and his courage arose.

With one hand upon Bigamini's head—he held him by the hair—he managed to swim vigorously for the opposite bank of the river.

The wretched Bigamini was in an awful fright.

He struggled and sought to clutch at his companion, and finally securing a hold, he dragged him under, too.

Toro was a veteran swimmer and he knew exactly the danger he ran.

What was better, he knew how to avoid it. He fought Bigamini off promptly, and once more secured a hold upon his head.

Then off for shore.

A few more strokes and he scrambled up the bank, dragging Bigamini after him.

Now Bigamini was rather more dead than alive, and it wanted one or two gentle taps from his companion's heavy hand to bring him to himself.

"You idiot!" exclaimed Toro, "you nearly succeeded in drowning me as well as yourself."

Smack!

"Ohoo!" yelled Bigamini, piteously.

"Take that."

"I've got it," roared Bigamini, rubbing the side of his head.

"Take that too—you imbecile—and that!"

"That'll do—that'll do!" cried Bigamini! "give it to somebody that wants it; drop it; I'm black and blue."

"You wanted to drown me," exclaimed his tyrant, "after saving your life."

"No—no—ohoo!"

"That'll teach you to keep cool and keep your head above water."

Bigamini did his best to dodge his tormentor ; but he got a cuff between each word.

"You won't give much chance," he said weeping, "you ill-use me so."

"Quiet."

"After all I've done for you."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Why, you——"

The rest of his remonstrances were drowned in a succession of blows, which Bigamini took without dodging, as he gave up any opposition for a bad job, and when the Italian was tired of smacking and cuffing, he rested, and so did his wretched companion.

There is an end to every thing, however, and as Toro grew fatigued, Bigamini lay back and groaned himself off into a gentle doze.

"Get up."

"Don't—ohoo!"

"Get up, I say!" thundered Toro, "if you go to sleep in your wet clothes, you'll get ague and rheumatism, and all sorts of complaints."

"I don't care," returned Bigamini. "I'd sooner go to sleep; I'm done brown."

Toro's only notice of this touching appeal was a kick—but oh! such a kick! It lifted Bigamini fairly off the ground.

He gave a yell, and started off at a run.

The Italian strode after him, only once turning round to shake his clenched fist at the four bloodhounds that stood regarding their fleeting prey with wistful eyes.

"We've done you," he exclaimed, exultingly, "done you, you beasts."

Bigamini limped along until Toro drew nearer and administered another gentle reminder.

"Oho," yelled the escaped convict; "don't I wish I was back again in quad neither, wuss luck, you brute."

"What?"

"Oh, don't. Why, quad was a Paradise compared with this; they didn't knock your blessed chump up every moment."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," said Toro, with a grim smile.

"So I did, so I did," persisted Bigamini; "the prog was good, though the parson did dose you with his sermons."

"And the crank?"

Bigamini pulled rather a long face.

"Well, the crank did give you 'what for, Lady Jane?' pretty much, but I didn't have much of that."

"Hark you, Bigamini," said his companion, fiercely, "sooner than be back there, I would lay my bones at the bottom of that river."

"Would you? Then all I can say is as I don't approve of your taste."

"Perhaps not, but I'd sooner any thing—yes, sooner be worried by those fierce bloodhounds, sooner, far sooner, be torn piecemeal than find myself put to the crank and to their labour, that breaks the heart in a man."

"You needn't have done it unless you pleased."

"And what would have been the alternative? The lash would have been the alternative. I know it to my cost."

And as he spoke, the burly convict shuddered, showing how heavily his punishment had sat upon him.

* * * * *

At noon they rested.

Had they sat down to rest a mile before they did, they would have been lost.

The soldiers in pursuit came up within that distance of the fugitives.

"Are you dry?"

"Dry," echoed Bigamini; "dry ain't the word, old pal. I'm just dying of thirst."

"Bah! I don't mean that."

"I do, though. I'd give all my fortune for one suck at a pewter quart of humble, and I'd bet that there wouldn't be much left in it when I took it away."

"I mean, are your clothes dry?"

"Oh, yes; dry as I am, quite," said Bigamini.

"Now then, say, do you believe I was right in forcing you to keep up?"

Bigamini pulled a woefully long face.

"Perhaps, but shall we give it up and rest here for a bit?"

"If you like."

He did like.

Down he dropped upon the ground, and before Toro had settled himself comfortably upon the turf beside him, Bigamini was snoring.

* * * * *

"He's able to sleep anywhere," muttered the Italian to himself, "and that ought, if all I have heard be true, show a clear conscience. 'He who sleeps, dines,' the French proverb says, but, *maladetta* ! I can't sleep on an empty stomach, however hard I try. Ha ! what's that ?"

His heart leaped to his mouth.

Suddenly, from behind a tree, appeared three armed men.

Fierce, rough-looking fellows, dressed in red flannel tunics, high jack-boots, and fur caps.

Each carried a rifle, and as they came up, they presented their weapons at the two escaped convicts.

"Lost !"

Such was Toro's involuntary cry.

But he rather overrated the danger for once.

"Who are you ?"

Toro was too amazed to reply for a moment.

The speaker repeated his question sharply.

"Answer ; do you hear ? Answer, or I'll blow you to smithereens."

"Travellers who have lost their way."

"Humph ! Lost your way by a hundred miles or so, I suppose."

"Yes."

The three men burst out laughing simultaneously at this.

"We know the sort of travellers that you are," remarked one of them, significantly.

"You've got on the uniform of the regiment."

"Yes," added another with a laugh ; "honest, benighted travellers."

Toro gave himself up for lost at the word.

The convict garb put aside all chance of throwing dust in their eyes.

"You can shoot us down if you like," said he, doggedly, "for we don't mean to yield."

"Oh, you don't ?"

"No."

"Call the captain," said one of the new-comers.

Another of them blew a shrill blast upon a small horn which he carried at his belt, and almost before the echoes had died away, it was answered from the depths of the adjacent forest.

"Blow again."

The answering call was sent, and in almost less time than it takes to chronicle the fact, two men came running up, closely followed by a black boy.

One of the men was habited the same as the first three in every particular.

The other's dress was almost identical with the rest, only he wore a hat instead of the fur cap, and by his side he carried a long sword in a metal sheath.

The black boy's dress calls for little description, there was so little of it.

You have all heard of the savage king whose toilet for state ceremonials consisted of a cocked hat and a pair of spurs.

Well, this young savage's dress consisted of rather less.

His whole wardrobe consisted of a cotten pocket-handkerchief tied round his loins.

He was a bright-looking, intelligent young fellow for his race, of a light and lissom build that seemed to indicate he could run like a greyhound and never tire.

"What larkth," cried the boy, grinning from ear to ear and showing a set of ivories that would have excited the envy of a London dentist. "Yah, yah!"

"What have you got here, Marchant?" demanded the man in the hat, sharply, his manner indicating a superiority to his companions.

"A couple of innocent, benighted travellers," answered the man addressed as Marchant, with a gruff laugh.

"Escaped convicts!"

"Yes."

"Humph!"

Toro was on his feet by now, and a sidelong kick brought Bigamini up beside him, blinking and winking like an owl in daylight.

"Get up and lend a hand," he said quickly. "They're down upon us, and we are lost, but we will fight for it."

Bigamini said nothing.

"Fight for what?" demanded the man in the hat.

"Before you shall take us back to prison," retorted Toro, fiercely.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" laughed the stranger, mockingly. "Catch any of us going near to prison. No, no; we are too wide awake for that."

Bigamini rubbed his eyes like one of those fishermen in the "Arabian Nights."

"Why, don't you see who they are?" he exclaimed.

"No, not I."

"It is plain as a pikestaff," answered Bigamini; "they are Australian bushrangers."

Toro stared again.

"Yes, bushrangers. Look you, friends, we are starving. Give us a bit of food, bread, no matter what, and a drink, and you may claim of us what you will."

"Give them food, captain!" demanded one of the party.

The chief nodded.

"You shall tell me in return what you were condemned for to transportation."

"Willingly," replied Toro: "I was innocent."

"So was I," added Bigamini, quickly; "innocent as a sucking lamb."

The chief of the bushrangers turned to his men, and quickly said—

"If I catch them lying to me, I will nod my head as a signal for you to shoot them both through the heart."

"Now," continued the chief of the bushrangers, "let me know why you are here and for what crime committed."

"I am not guilty of the crime I was punished for; I am innocent of that."

"So I thought," said the chief; "I never met a guilty man yet."

"Dat's right," said the black boy, with a guffaw, "dese am lily-white angels, yah! yah!"

"Hold your croakings, you black devil," thundered Toro, fiercely, "or I'll cut you in two."

The young darkey put his hands to his nose, and took a deliberate sight, while he wagged his woolly head backwards and forwards in the most aggravating way imaginable.

"Oh, you big baby. Catch Tinker first."

"What?"

"No catchee, no habee. Yah, yah!"

"Keep quiet, Tinker," exclaimed the bushranger chief; "and you are wrong to heed him—although, I must say, your confession of innocence is more than an excuse for a nigger—why, it's enough to make a cat laugh."

"Your doubts are natural, perhaps," said the Italian convict, "but although I have a pretty long string of sins to answer for, lying was never one of them."

The chief laughed.

"Well answered," he said; "but not to waste time. What were you convicted for?"

"Robbery. But I was innocent."

"Of course."

"I was, I swear it. But my whole life was raked up. Those police of yours are prying wretches—they turn a man inside out. They learned things of my past life which I had actually forgotten myself in the lapse of years, and when it was discovered that I had been leader of a notorious band of Italian brigands, I was condemned almost unheard upon the charge of highway robbery. I acknowledge to you that I have committed acts a hundred times worse than that for which I was accused, tried, and convicted, so I have no reason to protest in my innocence to you if it were not true."

"Very strange luck," said the bushranger, meditatively; "you carry on for years with impunity, and finally get nobbled for a job you have never done."

"Had I got into that little trouble in my own country," said Toro, bitterly, "I should have got off easily."

"How?"

"By what you call 'squaring' the police," was the reply.

"Oh!" said the bushranger, "the police in England are a brutal, hard-fisted set of men."

"Hard indeed!" growled Toro; "the two that took me nearly strangled me with their brutal knuckles that dug into my throat—I had to march or choke."

The bystanders laughed heartily at this.

"Yes," said Bigamini, "they can run 'em in. Oh, my!"

"And what did you do?"

"Oh, I married a little too much," returned Bigamini, making a very long face.

"Bigamy?"

"That's what they called it."

"How many wives did you have?"

"Only four."

"And you got punished for that!" exclaimed the bushranger chief; "why, you should have been rewarded by a gold medal. There's not a second man in Great Britain and Ireland that would dare tackle four wives—why, you are a hero."

"Let's give a cheer, captain," said one of the men, "for the man with four wives."

"Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!"

Bigamini stood before them bowing modestly, while they were yelling with laughter.

"We met here by accident," said Toro, "but we had been old comrades in Italy."

"Indeed! Was he a brigand too there?"

Bigamini looked anxiously about him.

"No—no—no!"

"Yes, he was. He was attached to our band as a spy, but at last he was suspected of playing fast and loose."

"How?"

"Of being in the pay of Jack Harkaway."

The chief of the bushrangers gave a start.

"Who?"

"Harkaway."

"Do you know him?"

Toro laughed bitterly.

"To my cost. He destroyed our band in Italy, rooted us out in Greece. Ah, it was an unlucky day that we fell foul of the Englishman, Jack Harkaway."

"I know all that story," said the chief; "so you are one of those men. What is your name?"

"It was Toro, then."

"Toro!" ejaculated the other; "you are Toro, the giant brigand?"

"Yes."

"And he?"

"Bigamini, the spy."

"Of course—of course. I should have guessed as much. Now, I'll tell you what, Toro, and you too, Bigamini, ours is a free and easy life—we are, as you guessed, bushrangers, and my band has a name which

has inspired fear, if not respect, in all the country round. Will you join us?"

"Gladly!" ejaculated Toro, promptly.

"And you?"

"Rayther, my pippin," cheerfully responded Bigamini.

"You know our names, now tell us your name," said the Italian convict.

"Morgan."

"What," cried Toro and Bigamini, in surprise, "Morgan!"

"Yes, Captain Morgan, the bushranger."

CHAPTER VIII.

HORSE TAMING A LA RAREY—YOUNG JACK TO THE RESCUE—
WHAT A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE DID FOR IT.

THE bloodhounds were got back by Monday and his sable companion from the fruitless chase after the escaped convicts.

Indeed, it was quite by accident that they had joined in the hunt.

When the alarm was given, Sunday happened to be exercising the dogs, for it was a very hot night, and he could not sleep, when one of the men from the gaol came running up, and pressed him into the service.

Next morning there was a great stir in the Harkaway household.

It was the day appointed for starting on their journey, providing all the preparations were complete.

The horses were especially troublesome, for several of them were not broken in.

Amongst the latter category was a colt that had mastered most of their men, and thrown both Sunday and Monday, who were good horsemen.

Accordingly Harkaway was consulted, and the colt was brought round to him to receive his opinion upon it.

"A beautiful little thing," he said. "How smart! What action! Yet I can see that he is a little spitfire."

And they all stood around looking on, when Mr. Mole came up.

"I must say I think that young men have degenerated since I was a lad," he said.

"Indeed, Mr. Mole," said Dick Harvey, with a sly wink at young Jack.

"Why, sir?" said young Jack.

"Why?" ejaculated Mole. "Do you ask why?"

"Well, I certainly did, sir," answered young Jack, quietly. "At least, so I thought."

"Then I may tell you it is because when I was a young man, I should have thought no more of jumping on that colt's back than of whistling Jack Robinson."

"About the same, I suppose, sir," said Dick Harvey.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you never think of whistling Jack Robinson, and I suppose you would just about as much have thought of mounting that colt."

"Well, I don't suppose that you are going to try, Harvey," said old Mole, with the most aggravating air in the world. "You have your points, Harvey, but you were never distinguished—you'll excuse my saying so—by any great degree of daring intrepidity."

"Perhaps not," said Harvey, slightly nettled. "Have you forgotten the Greek brigands?"

"Stop a bit," said young Jack; "let's all have a turn at him, and try if we can't get his mettle under a bit."

"De horse is a 'farnal tarter, Massa Jack," said Monday.

"Frightened you, Monday!" exclaimed young Jack grinning.

"No, no," returned Monday, quickly; "de horse as could do dat don't exist on dis here side ob Jordan."

Mole chuckled audibly.

"Brag's a good dog," said Jack, "but Holdfast's a better."

"I'll hab another turn at de animal, if I die," said Monday.

"Bravo, Monday!" exclaimed Harkaway, heartily.

"Bravo!"

Monday caught the colt by the bridle, and held him in a grip of iron, while he edged up to his side.

"Woa, woa!" cried Monday.

The colt remained perfectly still for a time; but no sooner did he feel the Prince of Limbi's knees near his side than up went his heels.

For this he was rewarded with a good smart punch in the ribs by Monday, which served to steady him for awhile.

Profiting by a moment or so of calm Monday leaped into the saddle.

"Now, no sooner did the restive colt feel the weight of his rider, than up went his heels again.

Then he reared up in front.

"Keep quiet!" cried Monday, giving him a spank across the haunches.

The colt sprang forward.

"Oh, oh!" cried Monday; "somebody hold him, or he kill me."

The colt then jumped up all fours in the air, and careering sideways as he touched the ground, over went the darkey, flat on his back.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sunday, "lubly hoss riding: old Monday bery clever."

"Went down all of a lump, eh, Monday?" said Dick.

"Monday, my boy, you ought to limit your daring to riding our goat," said Mr. Mole.

"Now, then, Sunday," cried Harkaway, "you have your chance."

Sunday perceived them grinning all round, and he would fain have been excused.

But there was no getting out of it.

"Up with you," said Harkaway laughing.

"I'se gwine, sir; dis child not afraid," returned Sunday who was especially anxious that his shrinking should not be observed.

"The beast is not vicious," said Harvey. "I'm sure of that."

"Try him, Dick," said Mole.

"If Sunday is dropped, I will," answered Harvey.

"Hab my turn; I don't want it, Massa Harvey," said Sunday, jumping back with alacrity.

"No, thanks; up you go, Sunday."

"My opinion," Mr. Mole observed, with some dignity, "is that the girth is much too tight; you're cutting the horse in two, and yet you are surprised to find him restive."

Sunday glanced at it, and nodded at Mole.

"Tank'ee, budder-in-la'," he said, with that peculiar

grin which made the old gentleman writhe ; " I'se almost sartain you've got it right for once, old boy."

He loosened the girth, and then he caught at the horse's mane.

Round and round went the vicious beast, and do all he would, he could not get his foot in the stirrup.

" Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mr. Mole. " Very good, a very good horseman—quite a Ducrow."

" Quite a Jim Crow," said Jefferson, grinning.

" That's nearer the mark."

This excited such a grin, that Sunday lost his temper.

" Look hyar, budder-in-la'," said he, " don't you go to be so 'farnal dam imperent."

" Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the whole of the bystanders.

Goaded to deeds of daring by this, Sunday, who was remarkably active, rushed at the colt, and catching wildly at the mane, he made a prodigious leap.

Hey, presto!

He was in the saddle.

But alas! for the poor darkey, the colt had been too quick for him, and pirouetted just at the self-same moment that Sunday had made his leap, and the consequence was, although he was up, he found himself the wrong side of London.

In other words, he was facing the tail, which he grabbed at, on the first impulsive instinct, and now held as a bridle.

It was a sight to remember then.

The darkey's look of amazement as he held the tail was comical in the extreme.

" What's dat; not him head?" he ejaculated, staring about stupidly.

He looked at Mole, and at Harvey, and then at young Jack, as if suspecting that they were responsible for this mishap.

" Bravo, Sunday!" cried Mr. Mole, vociferously.

" Bravo!"

" That's the best way to get up."

" You'll stay on quite as long that way," said Mr. Mole; " but mind you don't swallow his tail."

" Go an' swally yar wooden props, brudder-in-la'," said Sunday, with ineffable contempt.

" Insolent nigger!" retorted Mr. Mole.

"Yah!"

The wild yell of the infuriated nigger set the colt on the pirouette again.

Round and round.

Still Sunday clutched the colt's tail like grim death.

Up and down.

Then that ugly side-jump, like a frisky kitten when it pretends to be startled.

Sunday wrenched again at the tail as though it was a stout rein with a powerful bit at the end of it, when the colt, not approving of this kind of treatment, kicked out.

Up went his heels.

"Bravo, Sunday!" cried the boys, excitedly, "keep it up."

But just as they had uttered these words of encouragement, the colt sprang up suddenly sideways, and Sunday was jolted from his hold upon the tail.

He turned and clutched at the saddle.

It shifted.

"Golly!" cried Sunday, in alarm, "de blessed saddle is gwine to v'yage."

"The belly-band's loose," said Jefferson.

But no one could get near enough to the animal to tighten it, and slowly but surely down went the saddle, with Sunday clinging frantically to it, until he slid fairly under the horse's belly.

They did not laugh now.

This situation was even more perilous than droll.

However, the colt rested for a moment, and then Jefferson clutched him by the head and held him in a grasp which master colt took as a wholesome warning to remain still.

As soon as Sunday was rescued from his dangerous position, he began to abuse his brother-in-law Isaac Mole.

"Dat's your fault, brudder-in-la," he said, indignantly.

"Mine!" quoth the old gentleman, in amazement.

"Yes, yourn."

"How so?"

"Didn't you tell me to loosen the girths?"

"Bah!" yelled Mr. Mole, contemptuously; "you must have a rocking-horse to tame, my good Sunday; that is more in your line."

A general laugh greeted Mr. Mole's taunt.



"SUNDAY WRENCHED AGAIN AT THE COLT'S TAIL."

"I should like to see Mr. Mole have a try," laughed Dick.

"Oh!" cried the worthy Isaac, "that's the way you want to shirk out of your job, after making such a parade of volunteering to mount it."

They grinned at this, but Dick tightened the colt's girth, and vaulted into the saddle with the ease of an experienced riding-master.

Dick held the colt tight in hand, but the vicious animal made a sudden rush off, and then suddenly pulling up short, sent the rider flying over his head.

Dick was much shaken, but got up and joined good-humouredly in the grin at his own expense.

Jefferson now had a turn, and by sheer strength he created a sort of respect for himself in the colt's mind, but in a moment, he caught his rider unawares, and laid Jefferson as neatly as possible upon the flat of his back.

"Now then, Harkaway," he cried, jumping up.

"My turn," said old Jack, nothing loth, and coming forward with a laugh; "make way there. Let me get a fair hold of the wild creature."

At this juncture young Jack came forward, and begged his father to allow him to take his place.

"You'll get hurt, perhaps killed, Jack."

"I don't mind that, dad," returned the boy, promptly.

"I know that, sir," answered his father, "but I do."

"I don't fear danger, dad."

And as if to put an end to the discussion, impudent young Jack caught hold of the colt, and jumped into the saddle.

The frisky animal had not had such a light weight outside before, so he played some pranks of quite a novel and unexpected character.

He bounded forward and stopped short.

Then danced aside.

Then took a run, and jumped an imaginary brook, but young Jack held on.

He was more difficult to dislodge than any of his predecessors.

The colt grew frantic.

Up it went on its hind legs, until young Jack was in a perfectly perpendicular attitude.

"So, sir," said the young rider, "you won't give over; you'll not keep still."

The colt's reply was to bound in the air all four legs together.

Then off he tore.

A mad, wild gallop, just as Mazeppa was borne through the desert.

"Jack, Jack!" cried his father, "for Heaven's sake, take care."

Young Jack stuck well to the wild colt.

After careering round and round for awhile like this—for he was forced to obey the rein a little—he came to a sudden stoppage and stood for a moment, prior to springing off again, but young Jack did not leave him time to get off again.

He had a bottle of champagne in his pocket which he had put there for the colt as an experiment.

And waiting his chance, then seizing the bottle by the neck, he gave the colt a sharp and heavy blow with the body of the bottle across the forehead.

Bang went the bottle, between his ears, and the wine streamed down his face, and running into his eyes, the colt stood still upon the instant, trembling from head to foot with fear—but tamed as if by magic.

"Now," said his rider, and his master, young Jack, "just go round to please me."

He touched the colt lightly with the spur, and he started off at an easy canter.

Back he came, and stood stock-still in the exact spot where young Jack wished him to.

"He won't try those larks on again," said the boy.

"Bravo, Jack!" shouted Jefferson.

They all caught up the cry, Mole included, shouting—

"Bravo, Champagne Jack!"

And young Jack was decidedly the colt-tamer and hero of the hour.

CHAPTER IX.

**ROOK THE CONVICT—THE HARKAWAY PARTY ON THE MARCH—
AN INCIDENT OF TRAVEL—THE ALARM AT THE CAMP—MIKE'S
WARNING.**

THE expedition started for their new settlement.

"It looks like a grand caravan," said young Jack.

And in point of fact, it was rather an important procession altogether.

Leading them were the two darkeys, who formed a sort of advanced guard.

Sunday and Monday were mounted upon a pair of stout mules.

Behind them were two mounted servants, who had been engaged whilst in Sydney.

Then followed a large waggon-load of necessaries of every description.

Next came two more servants from the colony, and following upon the tamed horse was young Jack, with his friend Harry Girdwood beside him, well mounted upon a coal-black horse.

Following these were two tumbrils of goods and chattels.

Then there were three horsemen riding abreast.

Jack Harkaway the elder, between Jefferson and Dick Harvey.

Next to young Jack's, this was the part of the procession which commanded the greatest attention.

After this came an open carriage or drag, in which were seated Mrs. Harkaway, Mrs. Harvey, little Emily, Ada, Paquita, Mr. Mole, and his dark spouse.

Following them were three waggon-loads of goods, then a cargo of female domestics, and a guard of male servants, mounted and armed, brought up the rear.

They followed the course of the river, and having by twelve o'clock come to a leafy glade by the riverside, they decided upon stopping to lunch and rest during the fiercer heat of the day.

"Get out the fishing-rods, and tackle, boys," cried old Jack, "and let us have some fresh fish to offer the ladies."

The boys went to work immediately.

"There's trout here, Jack," Harry Girdwood said.

"We'll precious soon have some then," answered young Jack.

A little patience, helped out by some skill in angling, enabled them to a land few fine fish, but no trout, in the course of a few minutes.

"They're not shy here, ma," said young Jack, to his mother.

"They're like my boy in that respect," said Mrs. Harkaway.

"Very good, very good," exclaimed Mr. Mole, "he's not at all shy, my dear."

* * * * *

Next day, about sundown, the party had made a considerable advance, and they were just thinking of camping for the night, when an incident occurred which it is as well to notice.

"This looks a favourable place for the ladies' tent," said Jefferson, surveying an open spot closely surrounded by trees.

Harkaway rode up with the two coloured gentlemen.

"Yes, this will do. Up with the tent. Rook, Rook! Why, where the deuce is Rook?"

The word went forward.

"Rook!" cried several of the party, in a chorus.

"Where is he?"

There was a general hunt at this, for Rook was quite an expert at tent-pitching and as their present tent was of considerable dimensions, it wanted someone who understood his work to take the management of it.

Rook was one of the helps or men-servants who had been engaged by Harkaway from the convict settlement.

He had been strongly recommended by the chaplain and by the governor, who both attested to Rook's good behaviour.

* * * * *

"Where is Rook? Why, there he is," cried Harry Girdwood, standing up in his stirrups.

"Where?"

"In the water."

They turned round at this, and then they perceived Rook a long way down the stream swimming round a white object which was bobbing about in the water.

What could it be?

"He is imprudent to go bathing while he is so hot," said Jefferson. "I heard him complaining of the heat not an hour ago."

"So did I."

A shout was raised for him, but the distance being too great for the voice to reach, a call was blown by young Jack upon his bugle—a signal understood to recall stragglers from the party, which was a very useful thing in such a party as this was—and its shrill echo soon caught his attention.

The swimmer threw up one arm and waved it in acknowledgment of the signal, then he struck out for shore.

To throw on his guernsey, flannel garibaldi, and get into his boots was the work but of a few moments.

Then off he ran and came up at a quick double.

Rook was a smartly-built fellow, with a keen, cunning face.

He had an eye which took in every thing at a single glance.

He went straight up to old Jack, and gave him a semi-military salute.

"I hope I am not offending, Mr. Harkaway?" he said.

"No, no, Rook."

"Quite innocently if I did offend, sir," returned Rook; "the day has been very hot, and as you were nearly halting for the night, I thought I would take a dip before it got too dark; the sun goes down so suddenly here."

"There's no harm done, Rook," returned old Jack smiling; "we were concerned for you."

"You are very good to me, sir," said the man, hanging his head.

Harkaway looked rather anxiously round.

"Keep your own counsel, Rook, about the past."

"Yes, sir."

"Let us keep it to ourselves," said old Jack, earnestly, "and who knows but that a new and happy future lies before us, with forgetfulness, utter oblivion of all that is bad in our past?"

Rook stood abashed and silent before his patron.

Why had he nothing to say for himself now? We shall see.

"Come, Rook," said Jefferson, stepping forward, "up with the tent."

"We are going to pitch here, sir?"

"Yes."

"Very good."

Rook, aroused from a momentary reverie which the incident with Harkaway had occasioned, set to work in a regular business-like way to raise the ladies' pavilion.

"The centre-pole here, Mr. Monday, please; now, Burgess, and you too, Watts, pull altogether with me, and it is up in three movements."

Then the edges of the canvas were pegged down securely, and after this there remained nothing to do but to bring in the furniture.

* * * * *

Rook, the ticket-of-leave man, stood by the riverside, looking moodily into the water.

He was in trouble.

Sore trouble.

He was quarrelling with himself, and it's an old and true saying that that is the worst person in the world to be at loggerheads with.

"There can be no mistake about me. I am bad, thoroughly bad at heart," he mused, "or I should never have listened to Morgan's man and his temptations. I must be mad, too, for all questions of gratitude apart, my interest is here. This Harkaway is rich and powerful and generous. He is the first man who ever held out the hand of friendship to me, and he does it too when the world discards me for ever. Why did I listen to that spy—that serpent's tongue in Sydney?"

That question was very easily answered.

Contact with good and innocent people had gradually worked a change in his nature, which was perhaps not altogether bad.

But temptations had been thrown in his way.

Glittering promises, rich rewards, and a life of freedom had all dazzled a man who was barely free from the prison-cell.

And next moment his patron and would-be benefactor

had given him words of comfort and of sympathy, which wrung his heart.

"Fool, fool, and villain that I have been," he murmured wringing his hands in anguish. "What punishment do I not deserve?"

"Rook."

A light hand was placed upon his shoulder.

He turned shortly round and gave a guilty start.

Harkaway stood at Rook's elbow, looking at him with considerable earnestness.

"What was that white thing floating in the water?" asked Harkaway.

The convict's glance fell.

"Where, sir?"

"Where you were bathing."

"Only a piece of paper which had blown there; I saw it and thought it was some water-lily or other plant. And as I heard the young lady—Miss Emily, say she should like one, I swam out to get it, but I was disappointed, that is why I did not speak of it."

"What kind of paper was it?" said Harkaway.

"A paper bag, or some thing of that kind. It had been thrown away probably by someone of our party, sir, and blown there."

At this moment young Jack's voice was heard calling his father.

Harkaway ran off, followed by Rook.

He reached the Harkaways just in time to hear them talking of something which made him turn hot and cold all in a second.

"Mike was so restless and uneasy," said young Jack, "that Harry and I took him to find out what it could mean. We made our way towards that clump of trees yonder."

"What did you discover?" asked Harkaway.

"Nothing. We have returned for the hounds, and some more assistance."

"Very prudent, Jack."

"Why, you see, dad, if it is only some large game, we should get Mike into trouble, perhaps, and if any thing worse, it is as well for us to be prepared."

"Very good indeed, Jack. Jefferson!"

"What now?"

"Get two of the hounds, and come with us to the wood yonder. Bring your gun."

Jefferson perceived by Harkaway's manner that it was urgent, and so he was soon ready with his gun and the bloodhounds.

"Stay by the ladies' tent, Rook," said Harkaway. "It is a post of honour, my good fellow."

"Yes, sir."

Harkaway and the party, comprising Jefferson and the two boys, hurried off, leaving Rook on guard at the tent.

"I'll keep my post," said the convict, looking after them; "but if any harm should come of this, to that noble-hearted fellow, Harkaway, I'll put a pistol in my mouth, and blow my worthless brains out."

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST PERILS OF THE NEW EXPEDITIONS—A TRAITOR IN CAMP—THE WATCH—A BLACK BOBBY UNKNOWN IN SCOTLAND YARD—THE SPY'S MISSIVE—A WARNING—TORO IN TROUBLE—FORDING A RIVER—WHERE'S BOBBY?

WITHIN a hundred yards of the spot where Rook had jumped into the water to bathe was a clump of trees, where there were three men lying concealed.

Three men?

Well, two were certainly men, and big, sturdy fellows too; but the third would be more properly described as a boy.

The two men had the dress and general bearing of bushrangers, and were armed with hatchets and with rifles.

The boy was a bright-eyed lad, black as a sloe and glossy as though his skin had been polished up with oil and bees'-wax, such as we use to renovate our mahogany sideboards.

Around his loins he wore a coloured handkerchief, which was his entire wardrobe.

He was armed too.

But his only weapon was a short axe or tomahawk,

which was stuck into the coloured handkerchief-garment in position.

Now one of these men carried a fieldglass in a sling by his side, and with it he was busied the whole time in taking observations of the movements of the carivanseri.

"Can you see him?" demanded one of the men, a huge fellow, whose foreign accent should reveal his identity to the reader at once.

"Who?"

"Harkaway. Is he alone?"

"No."

"Wait till he is, then, and——"

"And what?"

"Pop him off."

"What do you mean?" demanded his companion, in some astonishment. "Shoot him?"

"Yes."

"Why, what on earth for? I'm not given to shooting men for mischief's sake."

"But I hate this Harkaway like poison."

"Well, I know precious little of him," said the other, coolly; "but that little has rather impressed me in his favour."

The other stared.

"You mean that you like him?"

"Yes, for his courage."

The other's black eyes flashed fiercely.

"You like this man, do you? Well, then, all I have to say is, that any man who likes Harkaway can't like me."

The bushranger listened quietly.

"I don't know that I ever professed to have any affection for you, Mr. T.," he said, with a mocking laugh. "I deceived you if I did, that's all."

His burly companion swelled out and swore again.

"Morgan, beware of me; if you offend me, I have your——"

What more he was about to say must be left to the imagination, for ere he could complete his boastful menace, his companion clapped the muzzle of his gun to his chest, while his finger trembled upon the trigger.

"Silence, you bragging, bullying beast!" he said, in low, earnest tones between his set teeth, "and learn, my

maccaroni, that men who threaten John Morgan are as a rule short-lived."

A pause.

It was a precious awkward situation.

The bully's colour came and went.

He quailed.

Had he dared to utter another word of menace, his life would have paid forfeit for his temerity.

This he knew.

"You haven't any thing to say for yourself, Toro," said his companion, lowering his gun, "I thought you would come to your senses. It is no fault of mine if you haven't come to them before. But I object to scenes of this kind; let it serve you once for all as a lesson that our positions are not alike. I command—you obey."

Toro was cowed.

The black boy stared at the two in silent curiosity.

But by degrees it dawned upon him that they were quarrelling, and then he drew his tomahawk, and gave it a flourish.

"Um fellar am bery much considerable dam beast, sar," said he to Morgan. "Bobby slice um liver, sar?"

And he made a movement towards Toro, only waiting for his master's word to set to work in real, right-down earnest.

"No, no, Bobby; not now——"

"Do it quick, sar, tremenjously bery much, sar."

And he flourished his axe with great eagerness.

"No, no, Bobby; be quiet."

His queer English, with the extravagant adjectives, puzzled Toro, but he dimly guessed that the boy meant mischief to him, and so thought it a safe opportunity of venting some of the rage and spite which were boiling over within him.

"Saucy imp!" he said.

And he dealt Master Tinker Bobby one back-hander which sent him rolling over and over upon the ground.

The black boy scrambled up, looking quite dazed.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Captain Morgan, "that is what I can't allow. Quiet, Tinker; put by your axe, do you hear? If we see any thing more of that sort, Mr. Toro, we shall have to be unpleasant generally."

Toro scowled.

"You needn't fear for the boy, captain," he said, with a sneer.

"I don't fear for him," returned Morgan; "but for you."

"Me!"

"Yes; and I can't afford to have a good man like you maimed through any silly broil that may arise."

A sullen silence ensued.

* * * * *

"Look out!"

"Where?"

"There! See, there's one of their men who is going to bathe. Look, he throws his jacket off."

Morgan clapped his glass up to his eye.

"Why, it is our man, Rook."

He followed the ex-convict's movements with his glass until the bugle from the Harkaway camp sounded his recall.

Then he struck in for shore, and left some thing white floating about.

"That's what he has been there for," said Morgan, in a tone indicative of subdued excitement. "We must have that."

"Tinker Bobby go fetch it, sar?" said the black boy; "bring it tremenjous exceedin' bery quick, sar."

"Not yet. Wait."

They waited until the momentary excitement in the Harkaway camp was stilled, and then upon the word of command from Captain Morgan, the black boy dived into the water.

He was under for an amazing time, and when he shot up to the surface, it was close to the floating white object which had excited so much attention upon all sides.

"I'se got it awful bery tight, sar," cried Bobby, spluttering.

"Come back, then."

"Yes, sar."

He gave one vigorous stroke, and shot towards the shore.

The paper was written on and folded triple, so as to preserve the writing from the action of the water.

"Here's glorious news!" Morgan exclaimed, in subdued excitement.

"Let us share it," said Toro.

"Read."

He handed the paper to Toro, who hastily scanned it through.

"This is good, indeed, Captain Morgan," he exclaimed.

What was this?

Simply the following words, written upon what Rook, the ex-convict, had professed to be a piece of waste paper—

"The bulk of the valuables may be found in the van of the procession. They are contained in the last tumbril but one. Be wary, for they are all fully armed, and every man here is a formidable enemy to cope with."

"None can speak better on that point than you, Toro, I believe," said Captain Morgan.

"To my cost I know it."

"Forward, then!" said Morgan.

They hurried along, skirting the wood lining their bank of the river until they got about a hundred yards or so ahead of the encampment.

"Now," said Captain Morgan, "we shall have to ford it."

"Yes."

"Bobby!"

"Sar?"

"Try the river."

"Yes."

The black boy dropped down into the river in the twinkling of an eye, and instead of being able to ford it, he discovered himself in a hole a good twelve feet deep.

But he was so thoroughly used to the water that he shot up to the surface again in a crack.

"Bery considerable dam deep here, sar," he said spluttering and spitting the water out of his mouth.

"Hush!"

"Right, sar."

"Now drop again."

Down went Bobby, and this time he found that he could walk.

"Hyar we is, in full marching order, Cap'en Morgan," said Bobby, marching along with extravagant military strides.

"Quiet, Bobby," whispered Morgan, in a voice of

alarm ; "you'll put them on to us with their dogs, and if you do, you'll have all your work to do to get safe off."

"Tinker Bobby eat the dogs widout no salt," said the black boy.

"Don't you learn to brag, Bobby," said Captain Morgan ; "leave that to your civilized Italian friends ; they can brag enough for all of us. Let us be quick."

Now the prudence of this prompt movement was soon shown, for barely had they got thirty yards along the opposite bank, when they perceived a number of horsemen advancing cautiously in single file, with one of their number as outrider far in advance of the rest.

A blackbird's call was heard and the party halted.

"Tooey whoo !"

"Halt !"

"Morgan !"

"So stand and give the countersign," called a deep bass voice.

"Morgan it is," returned the chief of the bushrangers.

"Advance, Forster."

"Here, sir."

"Any news ?"

"None, captain."

"The party is here close by," said Morgan. "I hurried on to put you up to their movements. Be careful, Forster, for they keep the most lively watch, and hark !"

"What's that ?"

The alarm was heard in the camp of the Harkaways.

A shrill note, blown upon a whistle, followed by the deep baying of dogs, and a general bustle.

Morgan began to look concerned at this.

"Quick !" he exclaimed ; "into your saddles every man Jack of you. I would not risk an encounter for worlds. Not only are they stronger than we are, but it would assuredly risk our chance of a much bigger prize than any we now hold."

"I vote that we turn and fight them !" exclaimed Toro.

The bushranger veered round, and faced the speaker.

"Who gave you permission to vote ?" he demanded fiercely. "Into your saddle, man, or I'll blow your brains out."

That handy rifle of the bushranger chief covered the Italian once more.

Toro had found more than his match on this occasion. Morgan was equally fierce, and a clever tactician to boot.

Toro rode quietly off.

"Where is Tinker Bobby?" suddenly whispered Morgan.

Where, indeed? No one knew.

Bobby was nowhere visible.

CHAPTER XI.

A DROLL HUNT—FROM GAY TO GRAVE—THE ALLIGATOR AND THE BLACK BOY—SAVED BY A HAIR.

THE alarm in the Harkaway camp grew general.

"I think there is really something up yonder," said Jefferson, coming up to the spot where Harvey and old Jack stood conversing in whispers.

"What makes you suppose so, Jefferson?"

"The animals are so precious uneasy."

"The dogs?"

"Yes," said Jefferson; "and Nero too."

"Nero?"

"Yes."

"Does Nero know when there is danger near?"

"You seem to laugh, Harkaway," said Jefferson, "but the fact is, I have frequently observed that Nero was an uncommon good danger barometer."

Jack laughed.

"A capital simile, Jefferson," he said, "but we must get on after my rash boy, or he'll be getting into some mischief."

In Morgan and his bushrangers the Harkaways had a far more dangerous enemy to cope with than any they had known before, in Italy or elsewhere.

These were men of shrewdness—of rare cunning and daring to wit.

Young Jack brought along the two bloodhounds coupled, and after sniffing about for nearly a quarter of a mile, they suddenly bobbed down to the ground, and

with a grunt of satisfaction, trotted along at a sweeping jog-trot pace.

"Look, Jack," ejaculated Harry Girdwood, "they have struck the trail."

"Rather."

They followed the hounds at a trot for a considerable distance.

Suddenly the bloodhounds drew up short upon the river bank.

They sniffed about and ran backwards and forwards, whining piteously.

"At fault?"

"Yes," said Harry Girdwood, "the trace is gone here."

The words were barely uttered when the speaker gave his companion a sudden nudge with his elbow.

"Well, old boy, what is it?"

"In the river. Look!"

They saw a human being breasting the surface, and striking out for the opposite bank.

Young Jack brought his rifle up to his shoulder, and took a careful aim.

"Stop, Jack; don't fire; perhaps it is no enemy."

"What does he do here lurking about?"

"Stop."

"Send the dogs after him," suggested young Harkaway.

This was done at once.

The hounds were uncoupled.

"See, boy; there they go. Look, boy!" he exclaimed.

He pointed out the swimmer, and the dogs, with a snappy sort of bark, leapt into the water.

They made for him as fast as they were able.

But the swimmer shot through the water.

Then something appeared to alarm him, and he stopped short suddenly.

He turned round, and swam a little way along the river.

"We shall lose him yet," said Harry Girdwood.

"Not if I know it," said young Jack.

He looked to the knife in his belt, and, heedless of all consequences, leapt into the river.

"Jack, Jack, old boy," cried Harry, "come back!"

"No no!" shouted Jack, "I will see what this means."

"Then I will follow you," cried Harry, and he dropped his rifle, and took a long spring.

He dived rather deeper than he meant to.

When he reached the surface, he saw young Jack striking out with long and vigorous strokes towards the swimmer.

At every stroke they were overhauling him fast.

As young Jack neared the object of their pursuit, the moon, temporarily obscured by a cloud, shone forth, and then both he and Harry Girdwood saw that it was a black boy.

It was Tinker Bobby.

Now poor Tinker was in a sore predicament.

He was pursued by two enemies *plus* two fierce dogs, who were more dangerous enemies than the boys who led the chase.

Tinker looked around.

The magnitude of his danger lent him wings, and he made a vigorous stroke for the shore.

But young Harkaway was already there.

Up Tinker scrambled.

But before he could fairly gain his feet, young Jack pounced upon him, toppled him over, and knelt upon his chest.

Tinker was so blown with fright, and by his exertions to escape, that he could no longer struggle.

He panted and puffed.

And at length he managed to articulate with great difficulty these characteristic words—

"Tinker's considerable bery much dam tired."

Young Jack would have laughed under ordinary circumstances.

But he was too preoccupied now.

Where was Harry?

Before he could look round, the black boy muttered a word or two, which thrilled young Jack strongly.

"Where's de shark?"

Shark!

"Whoever heard of a shark up a river like this?"

Before he could make any further inquiry into the subject, a fearful yelp from one of the dogs caught his ear.

And then he saw, in a faint, confused manner, something which he never forgot to his dying day.

The first of the dogs which had leapt into the water was seized in the terrific jaws of a hideous-looking monster.

This was Tinker's shark.

It was a kind of caiman, or alligator.

And this was what had so frightened the unfortunate black boy.

But for the encounter with this ugly wretch, Tinker would have got clean off beyond all manner of doubt.

Young Jack got an awful startler then.

He never thought of the prisoner, but with cold drops of perspiration trickling down his back, he looked about for his brave comrade, Harry Girdwood.

He was climbing up the river's bank.

The unfortunate hound quivered awhile in the monster's jaws.

Then it was all over.

The alligator took him down as comfortably as though he had been a pill.

The second dog scrambled up the bank, and shook the water from his coat, blissfully ignorant of the fatal accident which had befallen his companion.

"Harry."

"Jack."

"All right, all right, old chum."

They whistled to the hound which had luckily escaped, and when it came up, they put it upon guard over Tinker, while they looked about them.

"That's an awkward job, Jack," said Harry Girdwood.

"What a narrow escape!"

"Ugh!"

They now saw lights dancing about upon the opposite bank of the river, and rightly judging that it was some of the party signalling them, they gave a yell together across the water.

It was too dark, and the distance was too great for them to see distinctly.

But they recognised voices, and this was sufficient to make them easy in their minds.

Just then came a well-known voice across the water.

"Jack, my boy!"

"Dad."

"Are you safe?"

"Safe and sound, dad," replied young Harkaway to his father.

"Where's Harry?"

"Here."

"Right?"

"Quite right, dad," shouted our young hero. "All safe, and we've bagged some black game."

"Hurrah!" cried the boys.

"Hurrah!" shouted several voices over the water.

CHAPTER XII.

GAME—A CRUEL JOKE—TINKER AND MOLE—A BAD OMEN
FOR POOR ISAAC.

MOLE was of the party.

"Game?" said the worthy old epicure, smacking his lips; "I hope it's a turtle."

"Why don't you come back?" shouted Jefferson, to the boys.

"They're making the game safe and snug, perhaps," said Harvey.

Mr. Mole took alarm.

"Don't frighten them. Let them take their time. Don't bruise the turtle, Jack," he added, raising his voice, "or you'll spoil the soup."

"Turtle be blowed," said Harvey, contemptuously.

The boys were still lingering on the river's bank.

The alligator's maw did not appear altogether satisfied with the morsel he had just swallowed.

There he was playing about in their quarter, looking longingly up the bank at them like another Oliver Twist mutely asking for more.

The second dog was apparently frightened out of its wits by the presence of the hideous reptile, and it paddled about, whining in distress, until Jefferson perceived it, and whistled it up the river's bank.

The noise of the hound attracted the monster's attention, and he left the bank where the boys stood, and shot through the water after it.

"Now's our time," cried Harry Girdwood; "over we must get, so over we go."

But this was not only attended with difficulty to themselves, for the prisoner would not move in spite of all their persuasions.

"Over with you," said young Jack, with an admonitory kick.

"Not dis infant," responded Tinker. "No like de shark 'nuff."

"Get on."

"Choke you, if you don't," threatened Harry Girdwood.

"Bery good, sar," responded Tinker. "Choke away, sar. Choking bery much gooder dan de offal, confounded, immense, big shark."

"We are going too," said young Jack. "And we're going to kill master alligator."

"Tinker's dere den, sar," ejaculated Tinker, springing forward. "Like exceedingly bery much, sar, to have a slice of the navigator."

"Navigator," quoth young Jack; "alligator I said."

"I means nabigator," said the black boy, blissfully ignorant of the reason of this.

In he plunged.

Harry Girdwood and young Jack dived after him.

They breasted the water simultaneously, and having, with their dive, shot half-way over the river, they were precious soon scrambling up the bank opposite.

The monster, whatever it might be, for it certainly was not an alligator, turned from the dog which it had been watching so earnestly, and darted through the water after them.

Just too late.

The beast had been pretty sure of the bloodhound, and a savoury morsel it would have made for him.

But he preferred the look of the boys, and so he lost all at once.

But he scrambled up the slippery bank after them, lashing the water with his tail as he quitted the stream.

"Dad, dad," cried young Jack.

The Harkaway party were all there.

They had their rifles ready, and fired.

But the bullets glanced over its horny hide without doing any damage.

Jefferson's experience was useful now.

He had tackled this kind of game before, and he knew well its only vulnerable spot.

A bullet in the eye decided the business.

The beast snorted and writhed a bit, while its huge tail lashed the ground, and then it dropped aside, dead.

"A good-sized turtle, Mr. Mole," suggested Dick slyly. "Capital soup it will make."

"Why, what can it be?" exclaimed the old gentleman, returning.

"What do you think it looks like?" asked Jefferson.

"I can't say," said Mr. Mole.

"Do you think it looks like an alligator?"

Mr. Mole rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Yes, but it can't be one. There are none in these parts."

"How do you know?"

"I never read of any animals of this breed or family being seen in southern Australia."

"Which only proves, perhaps, that the country has not yet been explored far enough. No doubt they would keep far inland."

"Don't talk rubbish."

"Very good," returned Jefferson, gently. "I won't. Since you don't believe, just come a little nearer and see for yourself."

Saying which, he slipped his arm through Mole's and lifted him along for some distance towards the vanquished reptile. Mr. Mole looked alarmed.

There was never, perhaps, such a lad to enjoy fun as the newly-made prisoner, the black boy, Tinker.

He quite forgot that he was in trouble when there was a chance of fun.

He believed their prey was dead, so he bounded forward and leapt suddenly upon its back with a wild cry.

"Wa-hoo!" yelled Tinker, as he leaped on the beast.

Up went the dead reptile's tail with a jerk that almost made it flick poor Mole's nose off. The valiant Isaac jumped back as though he had been shot.

"Oh, mercy!" he yelled, and off he flew.

"Wa-hoo, funny old man!" cried Tinker, and the young miscreant laughed until he rolled upon the ground, holding his sides.

"Get up," said young Jack, who was enjoying it all wonderfully.

"Yes, massa," said Tinker, bounding up like an India-rubber ball.

"What are you laughing at that gentleman for?"

"Yah, yah!"

"Do you hear me, sir?" exclaimed young Jack, with assumed severity.

"Yes, sar," answered Tinker, vainly endeavouring to suppress his mirth before his new master. "Ole man jumping on two bits o' wood, am so exceedinest dam ridiculous, yah, yah, yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tinker's laugh was infectious, and it went all round.

"Well," said Jefferson, "poor old Mole had enough to do to hold his own up till the present, but he'll have all his work cut out now, it strikes me."

"Rather."

"Why, this young sweep," said Harkaway, joining the group, "appears rather worse than any one of you. It is certainly a fresh torment for Mole."

"Poor Mole!"

CHAPTER XIII.

STARTLING NEWS—FOREWARNED, FOREARMED—ON THE WATCH—
SENTINELS QUADRUPEL AND BIPED—THE END OF THE TRAVEL
—THE NEW SETTLEMENT—ITS CHRISTENING.

"What's your name?"

"Tinker."

"Who gave you that name?"

"Captain Morgan."

"What!" cried young Jack and Harry. "Morgan the bushranger?"

"Yes, sar, captain bold man."

Young Jack and Harry Girdwood were the questioners. "Morgan had to serve him for godfather and godmother, as well," said the latter with a grin.

"Yes, but Tinker isn't a bad name," said young Jack.

"Tinker am a lubly name," said the owner of it, modestly.

"Quite so," said young Jack, "and how long have you been with Captain Morgan, Tinker?"

The boy thought awhile.

"Eber so long, sar; immense, bery long, sar."

"A year—two years?"

"No, sar. One, four, five moons, sar. All dat time wid Cap'en Morgan, sar, Captain Morgan and Massa Forster, sar."

"Forster?"

"Yes, sar."

"Who's he?"

"Massa Forster am friend ob Cap'en Morgan, sar."

The boys began to open their eyes and ears both.

"Perhaps dad had better know about this, Harry," said young Jack; "it is important."

"Keep him talking while I fetch them," said Harry.

"Do you like Forster, Tinker?" demanded young Jack.

The boy shook his head.

"No, um kick Tinker. Massa Forster am a considerable beast, sar."

Young Jack was on the grin at this, when Harkaway and Harvey came up.

"What does this Mr. Forster do?" asked young Jack, giving his father a side glance of significance.

"He tell de oders what to do when de Cap'en Morgan am out ob de way."

"Oh, I see," said Harry Girdwood, "he's what they call the lieutenant, I suppose?"

"De what?"

"Lieutenant."

Tinker's eyes glistened intelligently.

"Yes, sar, dat's it. How do you know dat? Tinker neber tell yer."

"I know very well," said Harry.

"So Mr. Forster is the lieutenant?"

"Yes, sar, left-tenant, dat's it, and Cap'en Morgan am de right-tenant, yah, yah!"

Tinker's very small joke caused a laugh all round.

"And what did you do while you were with them?" demanded Harkaway.

Tinker at once grew serious.

As he was silent, they pressed the question.

"Me no tell you."

"Why not?"

"You get considerable dam mad wid this poor Tinker. You kill him."

"No, we shall not, Tinker," said Harkaway, kindly ; "we shall not treat you a bit the worse."

Tinker looked at the speaker earnestly.

"Sartin?"

"Sartin," responded old Jack, grinning.

The black boy was apparently reassured by Harkaway's manner.

"Tinker had to look after you, all your carts and 'osses an' sich."

The listeners exchanged sharp glances of intelligence together.

This told a whole tale.

"Are they watching us, Tinker? Don't be afraid to answer. We shall trust you all the better if you are frank—I mean if you tell us all the truth."

"You no tell Cap'en Morgan, den?" he said, doubtfully.

"No, no."

"He kick and kill poor Tinker if you do, when I go back to him."

"I bet you never go back," said young Jack ; "if you are good and faithful to us, you shall stay with us and have a nice place to sleep in."

"And niceys to eat?"

"Yes."

"Me neber leave you," exclaimed Tinker, heartily.

"That's right ; and so you had to spy after us?"

Tinker nodded.

"Why you?"

"'Case Tinker get on without making ob no noise. 'Case Massa Forster says Tinker's got such a deblish black carcase dat de sharp-eye ole 'Arkaway neber see him."

"Oh," said old Jack, "that's it, is it?"

"Yes, sar."

"So you have been following us all the way from Sydney?"

"Yes, sar."

"What for?"

"To try and catch all de niceys you got, sar."

"Very good, very good," said Harkaway, with a sly chuckle ; "forewarned, forearmed. If they get their claws

on our niceys, as you call them, Tinker, I'll give them leave to keep them."

"If dey get 'em, sar, dey keep 'em, and no axe your leave."

"Bravo, Tinker!" laughed young Jack. "You're not such a fool as you look."

"No, sar; more nor you, sar; not such a fool as you look."

"Now, I suppose, Tinker, that if we had got on a bit sharper, we should have caught some more of them as well as you?"

"Yes, sar; on'y dey got 'osses, and dey got guns. Dey shoot de dogs, sar."

"Shoot the dogs!"

"Yes; dey no like dogs; Massa Forster says de 'fernal dogs spile eberyting; else he bag—bag your missus—he bag all de bressed bilin'. Dat's what Massa Forster say."

The listeners looked more and more serious, as word after word fell from the black boy.

It revealed a plot against them of a very serious nature—their lives were at stake.

Constant vigilance was the only thing which could save them from death.

* * * * *

"Jack."

"Yes, dad."

"I leave Tinker to your charge."

"Very good, dad."

"Be careful. Never lose sight of him. It is the most lucky hit you ever made in your life, to have got hold of him, for this has probably saved us from a deadly peril."

"You may rely upon me, dad," returned young Jack.

From that moment Tinker was ever in the presence of young Jack, or of his comrade, Harry Girdwood.

That night, before they ventured to retire to rest, they went the round of the camp, to post fresh sentries, and leave all secure.

Everybody, and, in fact, every thing, was used to ensure their complete safety.

The two boys accompanied Harkaway on his rounds, and consequently Tinker was of the party likewise.

The bloodhounds were brought out by Sunday, and posted singly at different places.

In order to guarantee against their straying in the still hours of night, a stout stake was fixed firmly in the ground, and a good long tether allowed to each.

The dogs growled a good deal at the black boy at first.

But they were quite pacified when they saw young Jack take his prisoner by the hand in a friendly way.

Then they smelt him about, and finally accepted a caress from him, which was given at old Jack's instigation.

"Good dog," said Tinker, eyeing him doubtfully all the while; "not eat dat."

"What?"

Tinker pointed to something on the ground, which appeared to be exciting the attention of the hounds.

They looked closer, and found that it was a piece of meat, apparently a morsel of freshly-killed beef.

"Where did that come from?" said old Jack, in some surprise.

Tinker laughed.

"I put it dere, sar," he said, "special for dogs, sar."

"What do you mean by that, Tinker?" demanded Harkaway.

"Massa Forster, he tell me, sar, to put it down for dogs, sar," replied Tinker, "an' he put suffin' nicey, nicey on it for dogs, sar; make um sleep, sar, so as dey neber wake up."

"Poison!" ejaculated Harkaway, aghast, "poison!"

"Yes, sar; make dogs sleep for eber."

Every instant showed them some fresh symptoms more alarming than what had gone before.

"We were just in time," said Harkaway, savagely; "only just. Little did we think of this great danger which was overhanging us the whole time."

The dogs were placed at three most dangerous posts.

Two were so tethered that they commanded the thickly-wooded place upon their left.

The third dog was left to guard the opposite end of the camp.

Young Jack kept Tinker at his heels the whole time.

In addition to these precautions, they observed one very valuable rule.

A guard was mounted, and marched from post to post throughout the night.

Thus they avoided one very serious danger.

No more poisoned meat could be placed within reach of their faithful four-footed sentinels.

At length the camp was reached.

All was still.

All slept.

* * * * *

Bang!

The sharp crack of a rifle.

What was that?

Jefferson was on his feet, rifle in hand, in a moment.

Racing up to the place where Sunday was on guard, he found that vigilant sentry in the act of reloading.

"I see some thing dodging about over thar," said Sunday, "some skunk on the off-smell, so I dropped him a pill."

"Did you hit him?" demanded Jefferson.

"Can't say that for sure," said Sunday. "I tried hard to; that's all I know."

The dogs barked.

The camp was all alive.

Harkaway and Dick ran up, rifle in hand, and in a trice they were followed by the youths and the black boy prisoner.

But it all came to nothing more serious than this.

One of Morgan's gang had probably been loafing about, hoping to pick up some news or information to take to his leader, and venturing too near, had served as a mark for Sunday's rifle.

Sunday was a capital shot by this time, and if he did not hit his man, it must have been uncomfortably near.

The guard was changed.

When this was done, the camp was left in peace and undisturbed tranquillity till morning.

* * * * *

Whether Morgan and his band had taken alarm at the decided attitude of the party on the march, or whether it was that they had found occupation more profitable, we are not in a position at present to decide.

One thing is certain.

Harkaway and his friends were left to pursue their way unmolested from this night.

After a long and somewhat weary pilgrimage they arrived at their destination.

* * * * *

“Here we make our final pitch,” said old Jack, planting a flagstaff in the soft, springy turf. “Here we must start our new settlement.”

“What name shall it bear?” demanded Dick Harvey.

“Don’t christen it after me, my friends,” implored the modest Mole.

“No, we will not,” said Jefferson, laughingly; “much as you deserve it. Our new settlement shall be called ‘Harkaway!’”

A ringing cheer greeted this proposition.

And by that familiar title is this now flourishing settlement known until this present moment of writing.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUNSTON’S ADVENTURES—“OUT OF THE—TREE—INTO THE FIRE”—A LUCKY CHANCE—THE FIRE-GOD—WHO IS BLOONA?—THE MAKE-FIRE—HOW THE MECHANICAL ARM DID HUNSTON A GOOD TURN.

Has the reader forgotten Hunston all this while? Surely not.

It should be fresh in the reader’s mind that the wretched man, after travelling for weary miles through a desert waste of country which had been seemingly untrodden by the foot of man, had, when he least expected it, come upon a tribe of his fellow-creatures, whose appearance was any thing but reassuring.

A tribe of the Australian aborigines.

Upon their approach Hunston climbed a tree.

The savages, with many a wild cry, and with much noise and discord, marched up to the very spot, and encamped beneath the tree.

Here it was we left him.

He sat upon his perch, and shivered.

Not from cold.

Oh, no.

He trembled with fright alone.

The aspect of these people was enough to alarm anyone.

They were the most hideous-looking members of the human race that you could look upon, and their ugliness was increased by the filthy paints with which their faces and their bodies were smeared.

The women got some dried twigs together, and a handful of yellow grass, with which they made a fire.

But as there was not the faintest breath of air stirring, the thick smoke from the fire arose in a cloud so dense, that Hunston was in danger of suffocating.

He dare not cough.

Yet the desire to do so was irresistible.

He was strangling.

He grew purple in the face.

His eyes grew dim.

With a gurgle or gasp he swayed to and fro upon his branch, and feeling his danger, he threw out his arms to save himself, but missing his hold, over he swayed, and fell plump into the middle of the fire.

"Wa-hoo!"

The burning brands and twigs were disseminated amongst the assembly generally.

The first yell that burst from the savages was the signal for them to start back and seize their war-clubs.

"Wa-hoo!"

Hunston was momentarily stunned.

But soon recovering himself, he jumped up and shook himself free from the burning twigs, and looked about him.

"Wa-hoo!"

This time "Wa-hoo" meant some thing more than a mere empty cry or a savage yell, for the man that gave it sent a heavy missile at Hunston, which floored him.

They rushed upon him with the wildest and most alarming sounds, and seized him.

Hunston closed his eyes.

He thought nothing could save him now.

One of the women gave a shrill cry, which sounded like caree-ki to him, not that he had the remotest idea what caree-ki could mean, and thrust a burning brand upon his cheek.

"Hah!"

"You she-devil!" yelled Hunston.

He jerked himself under this torture, and gave the woman one terrific smack that floored her.

He got a good deal mauled then, and it would have gone even harder with him had not one of the savages, who appeared to be a man in authority, interfered on his behalf.

It was not humanity that prompted this interference.

The reason was that this chief, being a little more intelligent than his fellows, felt his curiosity aroused by Hunston's singular entrance upon the scene.

"You talk white man's tongue," said he; "me talkee too."

Hunston seized upon this chance with great avidity.

"You are chief?"

"Yes."

"Then tell your people that they do wrong to harm me. I do not hurt them—I may do you good if you will let me."

"Good."

Then followed a consultation between the savages, of which, of course, Hunston could not understand one single word.

Apparently he convinced them, however.

"Where you come?"

"Up there," replied Hunston, pointing to his late perch.

"Good. My people think you are a bad spirit."

And here the chief gave a slight chuckle, which showed that he was not altogether devoid of intelligence.

Hunston had a lucky inspiration at this.

"Not a bad spirit," said he. "I am a good spirit. I come to serve you, and them too."

The chief turned serious at once upon hearing this.

"Good spirit?" said he.

"Yes."

"What spirit?"

Hunston looked about him.

"Fire-god. You lit your altar-fire there, and it called me down."

"What for?"

"To serve you."

"Where you come from then?"

"The sky?"

"Where Bloona come from?"

Hunston had not the remotest idea what was meant.

But it was neck or nothing now.

"Yes."

This the chief communicated to his people.

An animated discussion took place, the issue of which was awaited by Hunston with considerable anxiety.

The savage chief turned to him with a serious air.

"You no fire-god."

"What mean you?"

"If you fire-god," said the savage, sternly, "de fire no burn you."

"It does not burn me," returned Hunston, boldly.

"Look!"

The savage touched him upon the burnt cheek, from which the scathed flesh was now peeling.

"Oh!"

He winced.

But he pulled himself together.

"On the face," he said, promptly, "yes, but not every where. Fire-god burn's on the face only just like you."

"But the body?"

"No."

This was the luckiest thought Hunston ever had.

His presence of mind now saved his life.

"See here."

He took one of the burning sticks by the flaming end in his mechanical hand.

"Good."

"Wa-hoo!" cried the others.

"Wa-hoo" had to do service, apparently, for an endless variety of expressions in their native tongue.

"Do you see, O unbelievers?" said Hunston; "I can with my hand hold this fiery brand without hurt."

"Yes, yes."

The savages yelled their approval in deafening fashion.

The self-styled fire-god then, holding the burning brand by the flaming end, transferred it to his other hand by the unburnt end.

Then he bared his arm.

His mechanical arm.

"See here."

He rubbed the burning stick up and down the thick part of the arm, and allowed it to rest there.

When the savages saw this they were filled with wonderment.

"You come from the same place as Bloona?" demanded the chief again.

"Who the devil's Bloona,* I wonder;" thought Hunston.

But he answered readily in the affirmative.

"My people say," objected the chief, "that you can't be of the same race as Bloona."

"Why?"

"Because you are white."

"And Bloona is black?"

"Yes. You know Bloona?"

"Of course."

"Why she black, then?"

"There are white as well as black upon earth, are there not? Why should there not be white and black up there?"

"Yes, yes."

This was seemingly unanswerable to the chief.

"You come to do us good?" said he to Hunston, presently.

"If you let me."

"You help us catch lots of game?"

"Yes."

"You shoot with make-fire?"

This would not have been very comprehensible had not the savage shown his meaning by pantomime.

He cocked his fingers into a trigger, and imitated the firing of a gun.

"Yes," answered Hunston, "of course. Fire-god does every thing like that."

"Good!"

"But I have no gun."

"Gun?"

"Make-fire—gun."

* The reader, perhaps, is asking the same question but, we hope, in more moderate language. Bloona is shortly to appear upon the scene; meanwhile, we may content ourselves with observing that Bloona is a person in whom the reader is sure to take the liveliest interest.

"Ha! Good!"

He ran off, and reappeared in a minute or two with a rifle and a powder-flask, and all kinds of modern appliances.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the fire-god in surprise, "where did this come from?"

"Me kill white man with spear and take it all away," answered the chief, with pride.

"Humph!"

"Make fire now," said the savage.

Hunston at once proceeded to gratify them.

The savages crowded round him as he loaded the rifle.

They had killed the owner of the rifle to steal it, but when they had got the treasure it was useless to them.

"What shall I shoot?" said Hunston, to the savage chief.

"That."

He pointed to a bird of gaudy-coloured plumage which just then rose with a shrill call from the nearest tree.

Hunston was by no means a bad shot.

He brought the rifle to his shoulder, fired, and down fell the poor parroquet in the throes of death.

"Wa-hoo!" they cried.

And they all fell upon their faces around the wonderful fire-god.

Hunston was once more in power.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE CHANCE—HUNSTON'S FORTUNES CONTINUED.

AND so it transpired, that Hunston's falling amongst savages was really the luckiest thing which could have happened to him.

He had from the first moment that he had been landed there by the Harkaway party, coveted the possession of a rifle.

Here, at one lucky stroke of fortune, his heart's desire was gratified at once.

And often he would look upon his mechanical arm, and smile grimly to himself.

"The legend on my arm does not seem to be verified for once. Why, it saved my life most unmistakably in this case," he would remark.

And so it had.

But was it not to reserve him for a fate more dreadful yet?

He lived for a considerable time with this tribe of aborigines, wandering with them through country after country, district after district, until one of the tribe came to them with the startling news that he had fallen in with a tribe of wanderers who were advancing straight in their direction.

This was not all.

The wanderers were not coloured men, like Hunston's companions, but whites.

Hunston watched the arrival of the white men with great anxiety.

"The white warrior they called Captain Morgan is there," said the leader of the tribe. "A great chief."

"Morgan? Who is he?"

"Fire-god not know?"

"Yes, I know," said Hunston, in some confusion. "I know—I know, of course. What the white men call a bushranger."

"Yes, yes," said the chief of the tribe, quickly; "dat right. Bushranger. Captain Morgan bushranger, great chief, big warrior."

Hunston was thinking very little of what was being said.

His thoughts were occupied by one sole question.

How to get off.

"I have it," he said to himself, "I have it."

"Much money, Captain Morgan," said the leader of the blacks. "Rich—gold—money—many cattle."

"You would like to have his cattle?" said Hunston.

"Could fire-god get Captain Morgan's cattle away for us?"

"Of course I could," replied Hunston. "I go there and I charm it all away. All for you, then make fire all, every thing. Shall I go?"

The savage chief nodded eagerly at this.

"Go, go," he said.

Hunston had some slight misgivings, as he approached

the group of white men, as to the nature of the reception he might meet with, so he hoisted a handkerchief upon a staff.

Now he had only just hoisted his flag when there was a visible commotion amongst the white men, and two rode out to meet him.

"Hullo," cried one of the horsemen, "stand a bit—who are you?"

"A friend."

"English?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing with those black devils, then?" said the horseman.

"Camping out," replied Hunston; "firstly as their prisoner, and now as their guest."

He advanced.

"Stand!" cried the horseman, bringing his rifle up to his shoulder. "Advance another step and I fire."

"Fire!" quoth Hunston, not a little startled at this.

"What for? I am no enemy."

"You are no friend," retorted the horseman.

"Why not?"

"No friend of ours is in the company of those treacherous black devils."

"But I tell you that they picked me up, sick and weary of life; by an accident they were induced to spare my life. I practised a trick upon them, and they, superstitious fools that they are, took me upon my own word for a fire-god."

"A what?"

"A fire-god."

Hunston then related in a few brief words his fall from the tree into the savages' fire, the lucky hit he had made, and finally how he had gulled them by the application of the fiery brands to his mechanical arm.

Now the part of his explanation concerning the mechanical arm seemed to strike the horseman singularly.

A strange, almost wild thought flashed through his mind.

He looked up suddenly, and spoke one solitary word to Hunston, which startled the latter.

What was it?

A name.

"Toro."

Hunston jumped back a pace or two at the word. Did he hear aright?

"What did you say?" he faltered.

"I only mentioned a name," was the horseman's reply.

"Say it again," quoth Hunston, his voice nearly failing him; "say it again."

"Toro. Do you know the name?" asked the stranger, with a keen glance.

"I—of course——"

He pulled himself up short.

What if he should be running himself into a new danger?

Was it a snare? No.

Impossible. So he reasoned.

And while he reasoned thus, the horseman was watching him keenly.

"I see that you do know Toro," he said, "and I see, too, who you must be."

"I—I——"

"Yes, you are Hunston. You can't deny it. In fact, I don't see why you should deny it. You are Hunston."

"How do you know my name?"

The other smiled.

"I needn't enter into any long explanation with you on this point," he said, significantly.

And as he spoke he whistled for his companions, who stood aloof till now, to ride up.

And when they came, the first of the party he saw was Toro himself.

Yes, there was his old comrade.

Toro in the flesh.

Hunston seemed in doubt for a moment, then exclaimed—

"Toro!"

Toro took one step forward, looking keenly at his friend.

"Hunston!"

"Is it possible?" ejaculated the Italian.

"Am I dreaming?" said Hunston, in amazement, "or can I believe the evidence of my own eyes?"

A mutual explanation ensued.

Fate brought them together by accident, or rather, by

a series of accidents, after they had been parted by thousands and thousands of miles of sea and land.

"Captain Morgan," said the Italian, "I wish my old comrade to join us. You could not easily find a more valuable recruit. Will you have him?"

"If he wishes."

"And you, Hunston, old comrade—what say you? Will you join our band? You may travel from pole to pole and not find a braver or worthier leader than Captain Morgan."

"With all my heart," was Hunston's reply. "Of all things, it is what I would have asked you."

"Agreed."

"Agreed."

"Your hand upon that," said the bushranger chieftain. "And you, my men all, draw round and swear him in. From this time forth Hunston is one of our band."

"And now that that is settled so well," said the Italian, "a word in your ear that will startle you."

"What is it?"

"What service are we engaged upon now, think you?"

"I know not."

"Have you forgotten an old schoolfellow of yours, that you have followed up since boyhood, and have threatened to kill?"

"What," cried Hunston, "you cannot mean that——"

"Harkaway is here," replied Toro. "He is travelling up the country, and we are tracking his party."

Hunston's eyes flashed fire at this.

"Harkaway here! Why, this is brave news, Toro, old friend. And so, after all, fate wills it that Harkaway should fall into my hands for my just vengeance. Yes," continued Hunston, clenching his hands tightly, "Harkaway, our reckoning is yet to come!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEW SETTLEMENT UP COUNTRY—THEY OPEN WITH A FAIR—MR. MOLE REJOICETH IN SONG—NIGGERS—THEATRICALS—SHOOTING FOR NUTS—THE FUN OF THE FAIR.

WITHOUT further adventures worthy of note, the Harkaway party reached their destination in safety.

And with them travelled their new prisoner-recruit, the blackboy, Tinker.

"Here," said old Jack, planting his foot firmly upon the ground, "here I plant my flag. This is the beginning of the Harkaway Town."

The rest of the party within hearing sent up a cheer.

"Hurrah for Harkaway Town!"

A log house was reared up in an incredibly short space of time upon this very spot.

They had every thing to hand for the purpose.

Timber there was in profusion for the labour, and there were plenty of willing hands, and tools of every description necessary for the task.

This was but the commencement of a series.

Around the first log house in which the Harkaway family resided, small but substantial tenements grew up as if by magic.

In an incredibly short space of time a small town arose in the midst of a wilderness. At length, when the town began to assume an aspect of completion, some of the light-hearted members of the happy band proposed to inaugurate it with a fair, with the view of attracting to the place all the people of the neighbouring stations or settlements.

Mr. Mole grew quite juvenile and uproarious as the preparations went on.

"We'll have swings, dear boys," said he, "and roundabouts, and cockshies, and shooting for nuts."

"And a troupe of niggers," suggested Harvey.

"Yes," said Mr. Mole; "and, above all, an Old Aunt Sally, my dear boys."

"Of course."

"An Old Aunt Sally, of course," added young Harkaway.

A strange idea flashed through young Jack's mind at this, the result of which will later transpire.

Suffice it to say for the moment that it proved to be an unlucky hit for the worthy Isaac.

Now, as usual under the circumstances, Mr. Mole, in the excitement of the approaching festivities, took sly nips of strong waters, that soon produced a very marked effect.

He could not refrain from warbling a ditty that had been rather popular in his young days—

" ' Yes, I own 'tis my delight
To see the laughter and the fright—
Such a motley, merry sight
As a country fair.

" ' Some are playing single-stick ;
Some in roundabouts so thick ;
Maidens swinging till they're sick,
At a country fair.'

"Ah," he went on to say, with a slight hiccough, "there's single-stick, and—and—by Jove ! I never thought of that. Who'll be clown for us ?"

"Clown !"

"Yes—must have a clown, of course," said Mr. Mole.

"I'll tell you," said Harry Girdwood "we'll have a black clown."

"Who ?"

"Tinker."

"Jolly notion !" exclaimed Mr. Mole, in his most juvenile manner. "A black clown, with white paint on his cheeks. Quite a sensation. Tinker will do well."

"We shall have to get up a concert," said young Jack.

"I'll sing a song," volunteered Mr. Mole at once.

"Comic ?"

"He, he !" giggled the old gentleman ; "not exactly comic ! something to tickle the general taste."

"Bravo !" said young Jack, quite convinced, apparently, that Mr. Mole would shine as a singer.

"And we ought really to have a booth for theatricals."

"Ah, a play. A play's the thing."

"I'll play a part, if you like," said Mr. Mole. "Romeo would, I think, suit me."

"Romeo. Yes, but we were talking of playing Hamlet," said young Jack, tipping the wink to his friend Harry Girdwood. "What could you play, Mr. Mole?"

Mr. Mole's answer was given promptly and with pride. "Hamlet."

"The principal character?" said Jack, with a start.

"Yes."

"That's settled, then. We'll get out the bills—I'll paint them—posters, with 'Isaac Mole'—in startling letters, three feet high—'Isaac Mole, in his celebrated character of Hamlet.'"

"We might add—'for this night only,' eh?" suggested Harry.

"Yes."

"That's settled."

"All we have to do, then, is to cast the rest of the piece, and to set work to study for the tragedy."

"Stop."

"What is it?"

"How shall we manage the old business about Hamlet's stocking?" exclaimed young Jack.

"We'll cut that out," said Mr. Mole, with great readiness.

This settled, young Jack and Harry Girdwood left the old gentleman, to consult about one of the last suggested items in the programme of their fair.

Aunt Sally.

Young Jack had a notable scheme on for this.

It resulted from some information which he had accidentally come by.

This information leads us back some little way in our history.

It is, however, an important incident, for not only does it lead up to what ensued at their opening fair, but it also explains the meaning of some curious allusions made by the chief of the savage tribe to Hunston, concerning Bloona.

This the reader will, in all probability, remember.

But as this matter is of such importance, it deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHORT RETROSPECT—THE STORY OF BLOONA—WHO IS SHE?—
YOUNG JACK DECIDES THIS—CONSPIRACY AGAINST MOLE'S
HAPPINESS—AUNT SALLY AND ITS AWFUL CONSEQUENCES.

THERE was an old coloured woman that travelled about the country from one station to another, who got a precarious living by a reputation for being a sorceress.

This old woman has a certain interest for all who have followed the fortunes of the Harkaway family and their companions, and therefore we request the reader not to skip the following lines.

This old woman was called Bloona.

And thereby hangs a tale.

It was said that those who had known her longest, remembered her being landed at Port Philip by an English vessel, and that the sailors had a wonderful yarn about having picked up a balloon at sea, in the car of which there was but one living soul, and that she was very nearly dead.

Great care and attention upon the part of the ship's doctor had brought her round.

But for a long while her reason appeared to have fled.

She could not tell them anything of her past life, nor could she even pronounce her own name.

"Well," said the ship's doctor, who was a wag in his way, "we can't learn anything about our dusky Venus, but we can give her a new name. She may be a new specimen of the *genus homo*, come down in a balloon. We can advertise the birth—'Bloona, dropped from the skies on such and such a day, latitude and longitude doubtful.'"

And so the name of Bloona, for want of a better, clung to her.

Now this old woman wandered towards the Harkaway settlement, and Harkaway happened to come into contact with her.

From the first moment that he saw her, he felt convinced that he had seen her somewhere before.

He had informed young Jack of old Mole's marriage in Limbi with two black women.

Jack thought he would convince himself about the matter, so followed up Bloona.

"Bloona," said the boy, "have you ever lived in other countries than this one?"

"Yes."

"England?"

She made no answer to this, but only gave a vacant stare.

She was harmless and very daft, although having frequent lucid intervals.

"You know what I say," pursued young Jack. "England—England, London."

A hopeless, blank look was all her reply.

"England, I say," young Jack went on eagerly, watching for a gleam of intelligence. "England, not Limbi."

This shot told.

She gave a start, and her eyes flashed fire at the word.

"Limbi? Ah, Limbi," she ejaculated. "Good Limbi?"

"You remember Limbi?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," said young Jack. "I thought you would remember it presently, Ambonia."

She stared at him, and then repeated the word "Ambonia."

Then she pushed her hair back off her face, and as old recollections, coaxed back by the mention of the name, rushed upon her, she gave a wild sort of cry.

"Ha, hah, hah!" she laughed, "I know now—Ambinia—Limbi—all—all—white husband."

When after a while she relapsed into silence, young Jack thought that he would try her still further.

Still he felt convinced that he had dropped upon the truth from the outset.

She was much changed, yet he could not fail, from what his father had told him, to recognise the long-lost wife of Mr. Mole.

He thought to test her by the name of her lost spouse.

"Do you remember, Ambonia, about Mole?"

"Mole, Mole," she repeated, several times.

"Yes—Isaac——"

"Ah, Isaac!" she ejaculated, with wild energy. "Yes, yes, I know. Mole—Isaac—my white husband, my own warrior."

Young Jack grinned.

"Mole a warrior?" said he. "Well he's not what I should call a warrior. However, perhaps it pleases her, and I'm sure that it doesn't hurt me. Isaac Mole."

"My own, my own!" called out the old woman, with wild energy. "Oh, take me to him, and let these arms clutch him tight—tight."

"Shall I take you to him?" demanded young Jack.

"Yes, yes; take me quick. I give him thousand kisses. He like me, I like him."

She seized hold of Jack, and began to drag him about, leading him such a dance that he almost repented of having tackled her.

However, he got away at last, with the promise that he would bring the lovely Mole to her.

He went off at length, and found Harry Girdwood.

"Harry," said he. "I've got the biggest lark on you ever heard of."

"What is it?" exclaimed Harry, with eagerness.

"Who do you think I've found?"

"Found?"

"Yes, found, for she certainly was lost till now."

"I can't say, old boy."

"Do you remember all the story of my dad's adventures in the island of Limbi?"

"Yes, every word."

"And do you remember that old Mole got married there?"

"Very much married, too much married," replied Harry, with a grin.

"Do you remember that he had two black wives?"

"Yes, one died, and——"

He paused, gave young Jack a sharp look, and then ejaculated—

"You've never found his other wife that he sent up in a balloon?"

Jack nodded.

"That's it; the very same woman that he sent up in a balloon."

"Get along; what, one of his first wives?"



"THE WOMAN BEGAN TO DANCE AROUND HIM."

"You've hit it, Harry," said young Jack. "She was picked up at sea in a balloon. Poor creature! she has seemed half silly ever since with the fright. Dad saw her by chance, and told me who she was like. So I have questioned her, and I have no doubt about it at all."

"Why, I scarcely believed in that part of the tale," said Harry, presently. "I half fancied that it was only a yarn about Mole having two wives before his present one, told to amuse us."

"Oh, no. Now for some fun."

"Now look here, Jack; we must take Mr. Harvey into our confidence, but not say anything to your father about it, or he won't let us have our full fun out of it."

"Agreed."

Poor Mole!

A disaster was in reserve for him indeed.

Dream on, worthy Isaac, while you may.

Dream on.

Presently you will awaken to a reality, which it will require all your courage and all your nerve to face.

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The fair opened with a flourish of trumpets.

Young Jack, rigged out as a herald, blew a tara-ta-tara-ta.

Harry rang a big bell, such as railway porters are wont to deafen us with.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes, oh, yes!" he cried, and declared the fair open.

There were hundreds of people from the settlements about that part of the country.

After a variety of swinging and shooting for nuts, and cockshies, and other similar recreations, they all started, accompanied by the noisy bell, to hear an entertainment given by an amateur troupe of Ethiopian serenaders.

Old Jack played the fiddle, Harvey was tambourine and the corner men were young Jack and his comrade Harry Girdwood.

They had new songs and new jokes and riddles, and altogether the troupe of niggers, who were known as the "Snowballs of Nubia," carried off the honours of the opening of the fair.

"Now, Mithter Bones," said Tambourine, "whath the next thong on de programme?"

"De 'Wooden-Legged Warrior,'" responded Bones.

The song was greeted with the most uproarious mirth and applause.

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After an endless round of amusements there came one of the chief attractions of the day's entertainment.

Aunt Sally.

"Aunt Sally you look upon as a rather degrading amusement for a man, I suppose, Mr. Mole?" said Dick Harvey.

"I'm not above being amused by trifles, Harvey," said the old gentleman, with a condescending smile.

"And do you consider Aunt Sally in that light, sir?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you never had a shy at your black relative?" pursued Dick, artfully.

Mole smiled.

"Before you were born."

"Dear me," said Dick. "So long ago."

"Yes."

"Capital," said young Jack. "I should so like to see you have a shy at the old gal, Aunt Sally."

"Good," said Mole, chuckling. "Good again. I'll go and show you a trifle in the way of Aunt Sally, unless——"

"Unless what, sir?" said young Jack.

"Unless my old hand has lost its cunning," said Mole.

"Why, you'll hardly believe what I am going to say."

"That's very likely."

"What?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I thought you said——"

"No, sir."

"I'm very glad of it, for I don't like observations which savour of impertinence."

"I was going to say that when I was a young man——"

"What an immense long time ago that must have been."

"A century," suggested Harkaway.

Mr. Mole's nose curled up disdainfully.

"Such trivialities are really beneath my notice," he said. "When I was a young man," he added, turning his back upon Harkaway, "I was known as the champion Aunt Sally player of the world."

"The champion Aunt Sally player? Dear me!"

"I'll tell you, what, sir," said young Jack. "I'll bet you a sovereign that you don't hit the pipe once out of the mouth of the Aunt Sally I will show you."

"What?"

"Not once."

"Bah!"

"Will you take the bet?"

"Of course, unless it is some catch, my young friend," said the old gentleman. "You mean to prevent me."

"Not I."

"It is a trick."

"You shall have a fair field."

"And how many sticks?"

"Twenty."

"Why, with a quarter of them I'll smash the Aunt Sally you show me. I'll shiver it to a thousand atoms."

"Bet you a sovereign that you don't even touch it," said Jack.

"Done!"

Off they marched in procession to the Aunt Sally.

Our ebon relative stood at some distance from the line marked for the sportsmen to toe, and of this Mr. Mole complained at first.

But they calmed down even this with the assurance that it was the regulation distance, and that it perhaps appeared further than usual to him, because his sight was not as good as it had been once upon a time, a statement which he indignantly refuted.

Aunt Sally looked very strange.

Instead of being the ordinary wooden doll perched upon a short pole or stick, it was a large black figure seated in a chair.

It looked like an old woman, and wore the orthodox frilled night-cap.

The most striking difference between this Aunt Sally and the Aunt Sally that we have all grown familiar with in this, the mother country, was in the pipe, or more properly speaking, in the way that the said pipe was carried.

Aunt Sallys, as we see them here, generally carry their pipes in their noses.

This Aunt Sally more naturally, perhaps, yet more unusually, carried the pipe in her mouth.

Moreover, this Aunt Sally had not that rag-shop-doll look about her which characterises all the Aunt Sallys we have ever seen.

There she sat up, however, looking more like a black Guy Faux of the female gender than Aunt Sally, yet answering the purpose admirably.

"It is a precious long shy," said Mr. Mole, looking rather blue; "never saw anything like it."

"You want to be off the bet?" said young Jack, hastily.

"No, that I don't."

"Go on then."

"Give me the sticks. I'll soon smash its nose."

"There."

"I shall not want all that bundle; half, a quarter will suffice, or I'll eat my head."

Confidence in his skill was shown in his voice, his look and self-reliant eye.

"I'll bet you ten pounds more before you start."

"What?"

"I'll give you fifty to ten, Jack," said Mr. Mole.

"Fifty?"

"Yes, fifty to ten that I smash the pipe, knock its old head off, send it to smithereens, wherever that is, in one shot."

"Done."

"I'll take you on the same terms, Mr. Mole," said Dick Harvey.

"You shall."

"Agreed."

Mr. Mole stooped and selected one of the sticks.

Having picked one out, he poised it in his hand with the air of an expert.

"This'll do."

"Now then, sir," said Jack, junior; "one—two—th—"

"Oh, dear me!"

Mole dropped his stick.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Harvey; "what was that?"

"It's very odd, indeed, Harvey, my dear boy, but I fancied that the figure of old Aunt Sally moved."

"Moved? You must be mistaken, Mr. Mole."

Yet strange to relate, the bystanders generally had shared Mr. Mole's fancy in this.



“‘HAH?’ SHRIEKED MOLE. ‘THAT UGLY THING MUST BE ATE!’

No one, however, said anything upon that side of the question, for Harvey appeared so withering in his sarcasm, that they did not care to incur its attack.

"You're not well," said Harvey; "something has happened to you. Try again, try again, Mr. Mole."

"I will," remarked Mr. Mole, with an air of determination; "it was no doubt fancy."

It looked remarkably like a wink for fancy.

However, he took up the stick again—he had let it fall from his hand—and prepared to throw.

"One," cried young Jack, in a loud voice, "two——"

"Hah!"

"What is it?"

"Look there."

"I see nothing."

"What," ejaculated Mr. Mole, "don't you see the figure?"

The simple fact was, that at this precise moment, the figure of old Aunt Sally had moved, the wooden old lady effigy had gravely taken her pipe from her mouth, and was nodding her head at Mr. Mole.

The latter paled with fright, as it were, and stood quaking with fear, and looking on.

"Look," he gasped again.

Young Jack had looked.

"Ahem!" he coughed.

And immediately old Aunt Sally replaced her pipe, and resumed her statuesque appearance and attitude.

We have said statuesque.

We might have said statuesque if not graceful, for graceful it decidedly was not.

"Whatever is the matter, Mr. Mole?" asked young Jack, seeming rather irritated, after he had shot another glance at Aunt Sally; "I really can't understand."

"You can't understand?" vociferated Mole, furiously; "then let anybody else but you look, and see for themselves."

He pointed to the figure, and every eye was turned that way.

"See there, the dreadful old creature is wagging her ugly head at me," cried Mole.

He paused—stopped short.

Then he said—

"Look again, Jack, the figure is opening its large black mouth, as if about to speak."

"What is the matter?" asked the bystanders.

"What is it?" echoed Mr. Mole; "why, I am positive that I saw it move its mouth."

"Whose mouth?"

"Aunt Sally's."

"Bah!"

"You may 'bah,'" said Mole, stoutly, "but I can trust the evidence of my eyes, and I can swear that it moved, opened its ugly mouth, and——"

Young Jack cut him off short in the midst of his speech.

"Don't talk nonsense, sir," he said, peremptorily; "if you want to cry off your bet, say so, only don't shilly-shally."

Mole was furious.

"How dare you, how dare you, you—you—you impudent young jacknapes?"

"Now don't call me out of my name," replied the boy, coolly; "not jacknapes, but Jack Harkaway, junior, at your service. Only don't pretend you can hit anything in future. I forgive you your bet, sir, if you can't find the money; that's enough."

This brought Isaac Mole up to a white heat.

"I'll stick to my bet, and what's more, I'll make you stick to your bet; and if you get the best of Isaac Mole, why, I'll—I'll—I don't know what—damme!"

"Go on, then," said young Jack. "Aunt Sally's before you."

"Give me the stick."

As Mole took the stick, Aunt Sally took a sight.

"Hah!" shrieked Mole, "that ugly thing must be alive."

Then the stick fell from his hand.

The bystanders looked first at him, and then at Aunt Sally.

The old lady had dropped her pipe, and was behaving in a most unladylike manner at Mr. Mole.

There was no getting over this.

She was taking a sight.

At length Mr. Mole recovered his speech.

"She's alive, alive," shouted Mole.

There was no mistake about it ; she was alive.

"Why," exclaimed one of the public, "it's an old black woman that has been gammoning us."

"Let us have her out," shouted another.

The suggestion was caught up eagerly.

A rush was made at Aunt Sally, and Mole was in that rush.

They dragged her off her seat, and pulled her up to where Mr. Mole was standing.

And then—oh, then !

What took place ?

Aunt Sally tore off her cap, gave a wild cry, and rushed at the dumb-stricken Mole.

"Isaac—my Ikey—Ikey," she shrieked, "my Mole, my own Mole !"

With which she threw her large black arms around his neck.

As Mole rested thus in her embrace, he noticed a strangely familiar ring in her voice, and his very soul quailed.

He was paralysed with fright at first, but recovering himself, he struggled to get free

But Aunt Sally was far too much for him when once she had fastened on.

She held him as if in a vise, and continued crying out—

"Ikey—Ikey, my own Ikey, my Mole, my own Mole, come to my lubbing arms."

"Hooray !" shouted the lookers-on in a chorus.

"Let go, you black devil," shrieked Mole.

"My Ikey, my Mole," vociferated Aunt Sally ; "come and lub me."

"What does she want with the old gentleman ?" demanded one of the crowd.

"It's my husband—my beautiful Mole," retorted Aunt Sally, proudly. "I lub him—him lub me."

"Hah !"

A cry like that of a wounded stag burst from poor old Mole at these words.

"Get out, Sally," said someone ; "why, he's got a wife already."

"Yes, and a black one," suggested another voice.

"My Ikey, my Ikey's only my Ikey !" cried Aunt Sally, again, in mixed anguish and affection.

Mole struggled to get free at the neck, and at length succeeded, but she held him still, although at arm's length.

"Mole, my own Mole, my pretty Mole," she exclaimed, piteously, "don't you remember your poor wife who went up in a balloon?"

"Ha, ha!" from the crowd.

"Ha, ha! Up in a balloon," cried Mole, in accents of mad despair.

"Your own lubly wife. Yes, dearest, I am for eber your Ambonia."

"Guggle, guggle!" murmured Mole.

And then his wooden legs gave way beneath him, and he sank upon the ground with a groan of unutterable despair, saying—

"Up in a balloon, boys, up in a balloon."

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWICE WEDDED ONCE MORE—HIS FEAR AND HIS CUNNING—NO
AVAIL—HOW HE GOT OVER HIS TROUBLE.

Yes, there was no mistake about this.

It was Ambonia.

Mole's Limbian wife, that he had married years ago.

Old Jack knew it almost at once when he had come across her under the significant name of Bloona.

The explanation of that suggestive name had told him all.

Hence the secret of Mr. Mole's present trouble, for young Jack had arranged that Ambonia should stand as Aunt Sally, and by that means discover her lost Mole.

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Need it be said that Mole's fright was some thing terrific?

You can imagine the poor old gentleman's agony.

Poor Mole!

This was a calamity which, of all others, he certainly had never looked forward to.

He had long regarded his troubles in the matrimonial

speculations in which he had been inveigled in the island of Limbi as over.

Alas !

He soon discovered his mistake now.

He was rudely awakened to the fact that he was rather more married than ever.

Far more so.

When he reflected awhile about his black American wife Chloe, and he looked forward to her meeting with his long-lost Ambonia, he felt as if cold water, to use his own expression, were trickling down the small of his back.

"Mole! Ikey!" shrieked Ambonia; "come to your old gal's arms ag'in. I lub you."

And she seized him in such a bear-like hug that she squeezed all the breath out of his body.

"Why don't you spoke to me, Ikey?" cried Ambonia, to whom the restoration of her long-lost helpmate appeared to give back her reason. "Ain't you glad to see your old gal?"

"Yes, yes," cried Mole, in woeful tones; "of course I am."

"Why don't you cuddle me up?" cried out Ambonia, in accents of bitter reproach.

She pitched her reproaches in such a high treble that Mole's alarm increased every instant.

"Dear, dear!" he cried, in distress, "I wish you would only draw it a leetle bit milder. I shall have Chloe here."

"What?" shrieked Ambonia. "What Chloe do with you? You my husband."

Ambonia fired up at the name of another woman.

"Eh?—nothing, my dear," stammered Mole, greatly perplexed.

"What name did you say?"

"N-n-nothing."

"Be golly!" said the dusky lady, eyeing Mr. Mole menacingly. "You said something about a gal."

"N-n-no."

"You did!"

Her voice and manner struck terror to his very soul.

If Chloe should but hear!

The idea was too horrible to contemplate.

Now, just, as this thought flashed through Mole's mind, Chloe's voice was heard close by.

Instinctively Mrs. Mole (number three) had smelt danger from afar, and she came running up to the spot.

"Isaac, my dear old man," she said.

"My dear——" began Mole.

"What you do here?" thundered Ambonia, in menacing accents.

It was getting warm for Mole.

Too warm for him.

"Who is that pusson?" demanded Ambonia.

"How dare you call me a pusson?" cried Chloe.

"You're a pusson yourself, so there now."

And this she gave out as if it ought to silence the other lady on the instant.

Chloe didn't know the other lady, it was clear.

"Ikey," said Ambonia, in her most endearing manner,

"Ikey, my lubby, if I find you have been a-lowering yourself by speaking to this strange pusson, you'll have to suffer for it, so."

And down came one hand upon the other with great force.

Poor Mole closed his eyes in despair.

"Mr. Mole," said Chloe, with ill-suppressed wrath, "tell that negro woman to go."

"Who are you, you black ting, tell dis lady to go?" cried Ambonia.

"Mrs. Mole, madam," responded Chloe, with a bob that was meant for a ceremonious curtsy.

Ambonia jumped up as if she had just received her death-wound from a gun.

"You Mrs. Mole?"

"Yes."

The other made no reply, but stepped back aghast.

Then recovering herself, she turned to Mole, and fixing him with her big eyes, she pumped herself up to a "white" heat, preparatory to opening fire upon him.

"So you got another gal, after sending me up in a balloon," she said. "You wretch! you beast! You get another wife. You send one up in a balloon, with nothing to eat, while you get another! I'll teach you!"

And she was about to teach him as she promised, when Mrs. Mole the third stepped up before her.

And then Chloe stuck her arms akimbo, and looked very big things.

"They stared at each other fixedly for awhile.

And then Chloe said in most significant tones—

"Well, mum?"

"Well, mum?"

"How dare you talk to my husband like that? Do you know that he's my lawful wedded, and that you're no better than a 'truder here?"

She meant intruder.

Ambonia was not critical as to a syllable, more or less.

She squared her shoulder, *à la* Madame Angot, at Chloe, and "went in."

"You're a low, ignorant nigger," she said, "for Ike was my husband before he heerd or seen you."

"Hah!" shrieked Chloe, "is that true, Ikey Mole?"

Poor Mole stammered, and tried to explain himself.

But in vain.

He could scarcely get out a word.

"Of course it's true," said Ambonia, "so come along with your own ole sweetheart, Ikey dear. Come to my arms and me take care of you."

With this she darted round her rival, and seized her faithless husband by the arm.

At one tug she would certainly have pulled him off his pins, had not Chloe laid hold of him by the other arm, and held fast on.

"Come here," cried Ambonia.

"Come here," cried Chloe.

And didn't they tug?

Over went Mole one way, and then the other.

After a succession of see-saws, Chloe, being the younger and the stronger woman, gave one violent tug that jerked their victim off his feet.

Down he went sprawling, and up went his timber toes.

This had a very remarkable effect upon Mole's Limbian wife, who now perceived for the first time the strange physical drawback of the husband she was struggling for.

What did those ugly wooden legs mean?

Ambonia remembered her Mole having two beautiful legs.

Mole, who, in spite of his terror was not exactly a fool

saw Ambonia's surprise, and was not slow to take advantage of it.

"This poor woman is altogether wrong," he said, as a last desperate venture; "she takes me for her husband."

"Yes," cried Mrs. Ambonia Mole, with great fury. "But what am these wooden legs for?"

"You see that she knew so precious little of me, that this surprises her," said the artful Mole, holding up one wooden leg. Ambonia was fairly staggered.

Mole went on.

Now was his time to follow up the little advantage thus gained.

"Hah, I see!" he exclaimed, hysterically. "My good lady, you must have known my brother—my twin brother, Isaac Ikey Mole."

"Your brudder?" cried Chloe, who couldn't see what he was driving at at all.

"Yes, my twin-brother," said Mole, while Ambonia stared in silence. "We were so much alike, that no one could tell us apart."

"Never."

"That's it," said Mole, "never! No one ever guessed any thing of it at all. No one could tell which was Isaac or which was Isaac Ikey when we had got our trousers on."

The ladies shrieked.

"Disgustful!" cried Chloe, stalking away.

"Stop, stop, my dear," cried Mole. "I mean—that is, the only point of difference between us is that which you see. Isaac Ikey, my twin brother, was born with his full complement of natural legs, while I——"

He sighed and pointed significantly to his wooden legs.

"You nebber born like dat," said the sceptical Ambonia.

"Oh, indeed," said Mole; "wasn't I? You look in the newspapers of the time, and the medical journals, and you'll see; why, the wooden-legged babe was the wonder of the age. So I tell you what," he went on to say, cocking his eye up at Ambonia, "you had better go over to England, and find my brother, if you want him."

But Ambonia, though rather shaken, was not yet done with altogether.

"No," she said, stoutly, "one of us is mistook, dat's sartain, but t'aint dis chile. Dat young pusson," meaning Chloe, "had better go over to England for de oder Mole."

Saying which, she made a grab at poor Isaac.

It was now getting beyond a joke, so Mole's tormentors came up to the rescue.

They calmed the irate negress Ambonia, and they made her understand that although her marriage with Mole might have been all right according to Limbian law, it would not hold good here.

Chloe, upon the other hand, was safely tied to the worthy Isaac by the Christian church.

This, and a bribe, with the means of returning to her native land being placed in her power, they contrived to get clear of her, but not before she gave Mole one tight embrace, saying—

"Perhaps me come back for you some day, Ikey, then me keep you all to myself."

Poor Isaac suffered more agony than will bear calm contemplation.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HOLIDAY—LORD HIGH PROTECTOR MOLE—LOST IN THE BUSH—
AUSTRALIAN SCENES.

MR. MOLE's game at Aunt Sally, and its results, formed a capital subject for conversation in the little settlement for some days.

Bloona, *alias* Ambonia, had for the time disappeared, though there was no knowing how soon she might reappear to claim her spouse.

Dick Harvey even suggested that she had gone to collect an army of the natives, by whose aid she would enforce her matrimonial rights, while old Jack suggested that perhaps she had gone down to Melbourne to appeal to the highest colonial courts to decide the question.

"Oh, Lord! there will be a pretty exposure if she does," groaned the ex-tutor.

"How so?" asked Dick.

"It will be reported in the Australian papers, English

papers will copy it, and then all the world will know that Professor Mole, com—ah ! ”

“Committed bigamy, you mean.”

“That is an odious phrase, Harvey ; however, be it so, and the world will laugh when it hears that Professor Mole committed bigamy, as you say, with a—a brace of black women.”

“Besides attempting to win the affections of a Scotch-Greek monthly nurse,” observed old Jack.

“Gentlemen,” said Mole, rising, “your conversation is getting vulgar and impertinent. I leave you.”

So saying, he stalked away.

Of course, they laughed at him.

But they could not always laugh even at Mole, and young Jack, with his friend, Harry Girdwood, began to long for some new excitement.

“Three or four days in the bush by ourselves, Harry. That would be the thing.”

“Yes ; I should like it.”

“Then I’ll go and speak to dad at once.” And young Jack rushed off.

“You’ll get carried off by the bushrangers,” said old Jack, in reply to his son’s application for leave of absence.

“We shall be armed.”

“No doubt, but you must not go.”

“But Harry and myself are a match for a dozen ; besides, we have not heard any thing about the rascals for a long time past.”

“You seem bent on going.”

“We are, dad.”

“You’ll come to grief.”

“You ought to have more confidence in the heir to your world-renowned name.”

“You ought to have less cheek, youngster. Well, go if you like, but I insist upon your taking Sunday and Monday.”

“And Tinker ? ”

“Why, no ; I may want the lad.”

“My dear Harkaway,” said Mole, who had been listening, “I really think it would be better if I accompanied this expedition. I should be a protection against all dangers.”

“Ha, ha, ha ! ”

"You may laugh—but surely you have forgotten how I vanquished the Greek brigands, and how in the days of yore I slaughtered the countrymen of this benighted savage."

The benighted savage was Monday, who had entered the room, and who now joined in the conversation, with—

"Don't you call names, Massa Mole—an' you nebber slaughter none o' mine countrymen."

"Though he married a few of your countrywomen, eh, Monday?"

"The conversation is growing offensive again," said Mole.

Young Jack, however, brought the conversation back to its starting-point—his proposed excursion into the bush, and finally old Jack consented, on condition, as aforesaid, that Sunday and Monday should be of the party, and that they should all be thoroughly armed.

Accordingly the next morning at an early hour they started—five of them—in a kind of rude cart, with very strong springs, fit for the rough work it would have to encounter.

Their course was a northerly one, young Jack's object being to explore, if possible, a range of mountains said to be situated in that direction.

It was very sultry weather, although the sun was overcast with clouds.

However, they had a compass to steer by, and all went well—

For a time.

Long before noon Mole felt thirsty, and the boys felt hungry, so it was resolved to take half an hour for rest and refreshment.

The meal ended, they resumed their journey.

Presently young Jack said—

"Those are not the trees we resolved to go to."

"Certainly not," replied Harry. "Where is the compass, Monday!"

"Compass, Massa Harry?"

"Yes, quick."

The compass, which they had already consulted twice, could not be found.

It was lost, and so were the young explorers.

A council of war was at once held, and old Mole, for a wonder, made a sensible proposition.

"We had better get on to those trees," said he, "and camp there, where probably we shall find fodder and water for the horse. To-morrow, if the sky is clear, we can steer by the sun."

This appeared very practical, and they agreed to do so.

But their troubles were not over.

The axle of the cart snapped with a sudden crack, and all their provisions went rolling in the sand. Monday and Sunday hastened to extricate the horse from the shafts of the fallen vehicle, but as soon as ever he was at liberty, he bolted, and was soon lost to sight.

"What is to be done now?" asked Mole.

"Take up our traps and walk," replied young Jack.

"Where to?"

"To that clump of trees where you proposed we should roost. So bear a hand here, Monday."

"All right, Massa Jack."

While the party were loading themselves, the trampling of many hoofs, the cracking of whips, and the shouts of men, caused them to turn their eyes in the direction of these sounds.

They were caused by a large herd of bullocks being driven homeward by the stockmen.

The animals, like all bush cattle, were more than half wild, and needed a good deal of force, as well as persuasion, to keep them in the forest track.

Some of them seemed inclined to make a rush at Jack and his friends, as they stood under the trees.

But a few cracks of the formidable whip from the powerful man in charge changed their intention, and brought them back to the ranks.

The men employed were four, of whom one, a native black, was on foot.

Jack's party hailed this opportunity of asking their way out of the predicament of being "lost in the bush."

But before they could do so, the principal of the newcomers addressed them.

"Hullo, mates!" said he, pulling up his horse, "where do you hail from? You've got bushed up, I reckon."

"We have indeed lost our way," answered Jack, "and

have been wandering all day without sighting any bush-station, or so much as a shepherd's hut."

"Well, you're on the right track, anyhow. It's always safe to follow the course of a creek, for it's bound to lead you to some inhabited place in time; but we're going to steer straighter than that; if you'll join us, you can have rest and food."

Jack and his comrades thanked him, and then asked—

"How far is it?"

"What, my hut? Close by; a matter of five miles. We'd be there in no time, if it wasn't so hard to keep these cusses in order. Come up, you varmint!" he exclaimed, cracking his whip over one of the unruly bullocks, who bellowed with the pain, and galloped away.

Jack and his friends couldn't help looking at that whip.

They had never seen such a formidable instrument in their lives.

The handle was not much more than a foot in length.

The lash was a terrible leathern thong measuring about twelve feet, and at the end was a silk "cracker," the sound of which was almost as loud as the roar of a cannon.

The man who carried this was a tall, handsome fellow of six feet, in a "colonial tweed jumper," or woollen shirt, tight trousers and big jack-boots, while his embrowned visage and long beard and hair were shaded by a broad-brimmed, cabbage-tree hat.

He carried a knife and a revolver, and was mounted on a powerful black horse.

His companions were stockmen of an inferior stamp and appearance, the native Australian, a woolly-headed and bowlegged specimen of black humanity, being apparently clad in the cast-off clothes of his master.

Jack and his companions were soon on good terms with the party, and the stockman was equally communicative.

"My name is Joe Freeman, and I don't care who knows it," said he. "I'm a native Englishman, like yourself, but I went out to California when very young, made almost a fortune at the diggings, ran through it, and then came here to get another. I didn't find it, though, and in the course of seven years I've been first one thing, then another, and now I've got the charge of the Gobberalong cattle-run, on the Wimmeroo Cree."

"Gob—what was that you said?" asked Mr. Mole.

"Gobberalong; that's where I live. It's a native name; we've lots of native names about here. The next station's Bangaranga; next to that's Duckandilly, Coomang, and Bunyiparinga."

"Upon my word, they sound very pretty," said Mr. Mole, taking out his pocket-book. "The aboriginal language seems a very liquid one—full of vowels. Let's put a few of them down. How do you spell them?"

"I don't spell 'em at all," answered the stockman. "This is a part of the Wimmeroo Creek," pointing to the stream, which they were now leaving behind them. "It goes close by my station, and afterwards flows into the Wurree-Wurree River."

"Is all this land under your management?" asked Harry Girdwood.

"Yes; our run takes up nearly all the Wangatoola plains and the Wurree-Wurree district. My governor, Major Durant, is one of the biggest landowners in the colony. He holds over fifty thousand acres of land, and has altogether two hundred and fifty thousand sheep and close upon three thousand head of cattle."

"You do things on a large scale here," observed Jack.

"We do, slightly."

In this conversation they pursued their way through the open forest, into the still more open plains, until the stockman's residence came in sight.

The stockman's dwelling-place was a large hut, built of "slabs," or rough logs, of mahogany colour, with a roof of bark.

Near it were one or two smaller huts for the assistants, and buildings and enclosures for cattle stretched away in the background.

"This is the celebrated cattle station of Gobberalong," said Joe Freeman, with a crack of his whip, "and you're as welcome to it as a nugget to a digger. No ceremony, now."

And having dismounted, he pushed open the door, and invited them to enter.

Inside the place was "rough and ready," but comfortable, divided into two rooms, one of which did duty for kitchen and sitting-room.

"This is my crib," observed Joe, "and I must leave

you while we 'yard' the bullocks, when I shall be ready for something in the provision line, as I dare say you will. Pete, old boy, put on some extra rations, will you? Steak and damper for half-a-dozen, at least."

At length driving in the cattle was accomplished, and the stockman, hot, dusty and exhausted, returned to his guests.

"There, I think we've fixed 'em all now," said the stockman, "and I'm ready for tea and dampers. Hope they're ready for me, Pete."

"Right you are, boss," responded the hut-keeper, "but I never dreamt as you had such a lot of company coming, and I've had all my work to make preparations accordin'."

"Sit round, chums," said the stockman; "all's welcome here. We don't see new faces too often to get tired of 'em. Well, I'm glad to say my work's done for to-day."

And sitting down in his chair with a sigh of relief, he took off his cabbage-tree hat, hurled his formidable stock-whip in a corner, and with Jimalong's assistance, divested himself of his ponderous jack-boots.

"Well," whispered young Jack to Harry, "this seems all very comfortable."

"Yes, but I don't mean to be deceived by appearances, I can tell you."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, I fear these men are friends of the bushrangers—in league with Morgan."

By the time all this had been said, the "dampers" were done, also some prime rump-steaks, "grown on the premises," as Joe Freeman whimsically expressed it.

"Not much fear of bushrangers here," said young Jack to Harry.

The tea was of the finest and strongest (coming direct from China), and for fear it shouldn't be strong enough, the stockman "diluted" it with brandy.

"That's not a bad idea of yours, my friend," said Mr. Mole, seeing him do this. "Hand me the flask, please."

And he was soon clutching a formidable "leather bottell," containing at least a quart of the alcoholic liquid, which, next to rum, was the object of his most passionate adoration.

"It corrects the rawness of the tea, you see," he ex-

plained, as he continued to pour it into the cup; "besides, being in itself of a nourishing and stimulating quality, so much so, that the faculty in England have of late years administered brandy in all cases of——"

"Take care, sir," said young Jack, "you'll spill it. You're brimming the cup over."

"Dear me! so I am," said Mr. Mole. "It has half filled my saucer as well; but I can't put it back now. I really didn't mean to take so much; it was quite an accident. Never mind; there are worse misfortunes than that."

"A great deal worse ones—for him, I should say," whispered Harry Girdwood to Jack. "From his expression, he evidently enjoys the accident a good deal."

"Well, I declare!" cried old Mole, drinking the beverage out of the saucer with a loud "swoop," of enjoyment, "if it isn't exactly like 'Robur, the new tea spirit!' Shouldn't wonder if this is how it's made. Well, this suits me capitally, and I recommend you, my boys, to do likewise."

"No, thank you," said Jack. "I prefer my tea and brandy in separate parcels. They don't agree well when mixed. The very smell of it always puts me in mind of sea-sickness."

"What do you think, pals?" said Joe. "I propose we all go out kangarooing to-morrow morning. A twenty-mile run or so after a 'boomah' you'll find good sport. Did you ever try it on?"

"Never," answered young Jack; "no more have any of my friends here, I don't think, have you, boys?"

Harry Girdwood replied in the negative, to which Sunday and Monday also added a disclaimer.

Mr. Mole, who was busily occupied in sugaring his tea, shook his head solemnly.

"It's the finest sport in the world," proceeded the stockman, enthusiastically. "Talk of your fox-hunting, with your kid-glove sportsmen in dandy clothes, and horses as smooth and tame as kittens, and all for chivying after a miserable varmint no bigger than a colley-pup! give me a spell on one of our half-wild bush horses, after an old man kangaroo; that's your sort!"

"Is there plenty of big game about here?" asked young Jack.

"Plenty of every game," answered the stockman; "kangaroos, dingoes, emeus, bustards, not to mention wombats, bandicoots, and the native devil. I could keep you well supplied with good sport if you were to stop here a twelvemonth.

"But can you mount us all?" asked Harry.

"Mount you? Why, haven't you seen what a little lot of horses we've got in this station alone? My governor could mount half-a-dozen regiments of cavalry, at a few days' notice to collect 'em."

"But they're all so wild," said Jack.

"Oh, we don't take long breaking 'em in by our system," answered the stock-rider. "We're rough and ready, we are, and I'll guarantee to take the nonsense out of the wildest colt in the colony under a week, unless he's got the very devil himself into him. But I always keep half-a-dozen good tame ones in the stable, and that will be enough for all of you."

"I'll tell you one person you'll not be able to mount easily," said Mr. Mole, "and that's myself."

"Well, it will be rather a difficulty," the bushman admitted, looking at the ex-usher's wooden pins.

"I certainly do find it so in general, Mr. Freeman, I assure you," said Mole, "not from any deficiency in my equestrian capabilities—oh, dear, no; I could ride like Mazeppa himself, if I only had my legs.

"My legs," repeated Isaac, sentimentally, apostrophising the roof of the hut, "my unfortunate understandings. Alas! they are gone for ever. I wonder where they are now, and what they are doing? How true it is that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.' Oh, my poor old legs."

And the veteran wiped away a tear just in time to prevent it falling into his cup of (brandied) tea.

"I tell you what we might do, Mr. Mole," suggested Jack. "We could have you tied to the saddle, and your wooden legs encased in jack-boots, fastened to the horse's girths. You couldn't tumble off then, and you would have your hands free to guide the animal."

"Especially if mounted on some spirited and sensible critter such as I can recommend," added the stockman.

"It mustn't be too spirited," said Mr. Mole, who had still some lurking doubt as to his riding powers.

"No ; but such an animal as my mare Wildfire would suit you to an ace, I know."

"Wildfire ! Don't like the name—sounds rather ominous," said Mr. Mole, shaking his head ; "too spirited, I fear, for a fellow who's not so young as he was, and hasn't his proper quantum of leg."

"Well, now, I know a horse that might have been made for you," said Joe, "a quiet old nag, called Milk-and-Water, from his mild disposition and his sort of sky-blue colour."

"Milk-and-Water, eh ? I like that better," said Mr. Mole.

"Not so well as he likes milk and rum, though," observed Harry Girdwood to Jack in an undertone.

"If it can be done safely," concluded Mr. Mole, "nothing will please me better than joining in the hunt. Reserve Milk-and-Water for me, will you ?"

"Certainly, with pleasure," answered the cattle-keeper, with a half-concealed smile about his countenance.

Mr. Mole having drank another nice cup of tea, well fortified, now grew loquacious.

"Ah," he said, looking out at the wild landscape, "this puts me in mind of old times."

"What times ?" asked Jack and Harry, in astonishment ; "do you mean to insinuate that you have been to Australia before ?"

"I did, my boy, I did," answered the veracious tutor. "I never told you of it, nor anyone else, for it's one of those things not generally known ; but I emigrated during the gold fever, and stopped a year and a half."

"Why didn't you stop altogether ?" asked Joe.

"No use, you see. Rough times. I had some sport, though ; went gold-digging."

"Harry," said Jack aside, "old Mole's at his Munchausen crammers again."

"It's the tea that's done it," answered his friend.

"Find any gold in the diggings ?" asked the stockman.

"A nugget, somewhere about this size, that's ail," answered Mr. Mole, holding up a piece of damper the size of his hand, "worth some hundreds ; but I got robbed bringing it home ; and then I was sent out with a government party to capture two runaway convicts. I got separated from the others and met the two ruffians face to

face in a lonely gully. We had an awful fight. I knocked down one and overpowered the other, and at last had the good luck to deliver them both alive into the hands of the government."

"Plucky fellow!" exclaimed the bushman. "And you got the reward, of course?"

"Two hundred pounds," replied Mr. Mole; "but I got robbed of most of that, too, and only had enough left to bring me back to England."

"Well," said Jack, "I am surprised! You never told any of us a word of this before."

"No, my boy; it was my modesty, you see—don't like to brag of one's own deeds, you know."

"Of course not," said young Jack.

"I'll tell you all about it," proceeded Mole, "but not now—not now. Don't feel very well, somehow."

Mr. Mole indeed showed symptoms of indisposition.

His face was red, his eyes bloodshot, his utterance rather thick, and his movements very eccentric.

"Mustn't drink any more Robur just now," he said, "too hot—pour it in the saucer."

In attempting to do which he blundered so that the liquid was spilt all over the table and floor.

"Dear me," exclaimed Mole, "what a pity! Beg a thousand pardons. I'll try to wipe it up."

And he half-rolled, half-threw himself on to his knees, and attempted to scrub the wet floor with his cabbage-tree hat.

But the effort was too much, and he was soon extended at full length on the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

His last audible words were—

"Wipe it up—wipe up the Robur."

"Well, if he ain't far gone, I'm done!" exclaimed Joe; "and no wonder. I ain't got a weak head myself, but sugar me if I could take three cups of strong bohea half filled up with brandy, and be fit for much standing up after it. Is he often took bad like this?"

"Yes; he's unfortunately subject to these attacks," answered Jack.

"It's a bad complaint," said Joe. "I've seen a good deal of it in my time. Let's wrap a 'possum rug round him, and put him out of the way in a corner."

By this device he was not only securely folded up in the rug, but "toted" into the corner near the fire.

"There, old fellow, you're safe now," said Joe. "Chums, it's getting nigh roosting time; here's my nest," he added, pointing to the sheep's-skin rug which he had laid down in front of the fire. "In the room there you'll find a regular bed which you young gents are welcome to."

"But we can't think of turning you out of your own bed like that," protested young Jack.

"Turn my grandmother! Do you think I ain't accustomed to sleep anywhere and everywhere—nowhere, for the matter o' that? One luxury, however, I can't do without, and this is it."

Taking out a briar-root pipe, he filled it with tobacco, lit it at the fire, and saying—"Good-night, chums; pleasant dreams," rolled himself up in his extempore bed, and proceeded to smoke himself to sleep.

* * * * *

It was about five o'clock on a glorious morning when young Jack and his companions turned out; and then the stockman and his assistants proceeded to tend their cattle and turn them out into the rich and boundless pastures.

Mr. Mole, who still felt some effects from his last night's experiment in beverages, confined himself to tea pure and simple, without making it into "Robur."

By six o'clock they were ready for starting.

Jack and his companions were well mounted on spirited horses of a breed not far removed from the pure English hunter, and such as would have been worth a good price in the old country.

The mounting of Mr. Mole, on the redoubted steed "Milk-and-Water," was, after all, a matter of no small difficulty.

It took the united efforts of Jimalong and Joe, assisted by Sunday and Monday, with suggestions from Jack and Harry, to secure the tutor safely on his equestrian perch.

The first attempt was so far a failure, that the venerable Isaac, not being properly balanced, pitched off on the left side of the horse, and on the second he tumbled off on the right, still more heavily, and would have probably been not a little injured, but that he was providentially caught in the arms of the Prince of Limbi.

At length he was properly fixed, and in repose.

He certainly looked a very passable, if not a magnificent equestrian.

The big jack-boots, drawn up to the thighs and fastened there with straps, were so natural in appearance, that no one out of the secret would have known but what they concealed real legs; or, to describe it in the facetious terms used by young Jack, no one would have supposed that "Mole's entire" was destitute of two leading members of the firm.

The proof of the pudding, however, is in the eating, and it remained to be seen how Mr. Mole would get on.

When the chase came to be in full swing, certain restless symptoms on the part of Milk-and-Water more than once made Isaac apprehensive that he was not so quiet a steed as his name and reputation would imply.

Little did he suspect that the animal in question was really one of the most spirited in Joe Freeman's whole stud, named, indeed, "by the rule of contrary," and that Jack and Harry had connived at this heartless deception.

Jimalong now appeared, holding with some difficulty four large dogs, a cross between fox and greyhounds.

The party had to get over some miles before they roused the game, notwithstanding that Joe had declared his region to be "chock full" of kangaroos, but at length a fine specimen of that tribe was discovered, and gave hopes of some lively sport.

"A boomah! a boomah!" was now the cry, first started by Jimalong, whose savage power of eyesight enabled him to be the first to espy the game, and the dogs gave tongue at the same moment as they also sighted it.

"Cobbon—good, good!" exclaimed Jimalong; "big kangaroo, old man boomah!"

It was indeed a boomah, a magnificent specimen of the kangaroo tribe, measuring at least, six feet in height, and mighty of haunch and extent of hind leg.

He was standing feeding upon a patch of long grass when he first became aware of his enemies' approach.

He instantly raised his head, looked round at them, paused a moment, and then bounded off in gigantic leaps of twenty or thirty feet each.

"Loose the dogs, Jimalong," cried Joe Freeman. "Now, then, my boys, sit fast, and prepare for a run; we're going to have some sport."

It was all very well to say "sit fast," but Mr. Mole, for one, could not well obey the order.

In the first place, his steed, Milk-and-Water at the very first signal for the chase, started off like a war-horse at the trump of battle, giving his rider, who was not prepared for such a sudden movement, a considerable shock, and causing him to clutch the reins tightly.

As the horse quickened its pace, too, he found that, despite what he considered the security of his fastenings, he began to "joggle" and bump about in the saddle in a manner that was decidedly unpleasant, and such as he had by no means bargained for.

He could do nothing at all to control the steed, and his helpless wooden legs rattled, as he went, inside the big jack-boots, like a thin rapier in the scabbard of a gigantic broadsword.

But Mole's courage did not give way yet, or rather, he would not show that he was frightened. So he forced his features into a smile, which was a ghastly imitation of enjoyment and high spirits.

"Tally ho ! tally ho !" and away went the kangaroo taking a downhill course, as these creatures generally do, for then their wondrous powers of speed are still further increased, and their enormous leaps even more extended.

No British red deer of old, with Robin Hood and his merry men behind him, could have ever been fleetier than this Australian substitute for the former quadruped, to which, in size and colour, he bore no slight resemblance, though the mode of progress was so different.

The dogs made after the game at full stretch, and the whole party were soon in the excitement of a rapid chase.

For a mile or two they seemed to be gaining on the kangaroo, whose pace seemed relaxing as if by exhaustion.

Jack and Harry thought the run would be a short one after all.

Poor Mr. Mole who got more and more uncomfortable as they proceeded, devoutly hoped that it would.

But Joe, as an experienced "kangarooer," knew the tricks of those animals too well for that.

"The critter's only reserving his strength," he said ; "wait till we gain on him a little more, and then see what a spurt he'll put on."

And indeed so it proved, for when the dogs seemed to be gaining on their prey, they suddenly saw the animal turn, and hopping over a high bush, set off over the open ground at a pace greater than he had before attained.

It was indeed an exciting and exhilarating race.

"Tally ho ! tally ho !" again cried Joe Freeman.

"Tally ho ! tally ho !" faintly cried poor old Mole.

As they proceeded they roused other game.

The bandicoot and wombat, seeing and hearing the threatening cavalcade, scuttled back to their retreat.

Sometimes herds of kangaroos of the smaller kinds would be roused and join the pursued one.

But the dogs, undistracted by these fresh objects of pursuit, ever kept their attention to the splendid quarry they were resolved on bringing down.

And how fared that gallant sportsman, Mr. Mole ?

Alas ! although he was destined that day to do prodigies of valour, he was any thing but enjoying himself.

Every moment his fastenings seemed to become looser, the saddle harder, his imprisoned wooden legs more helpless.

Every moment Milk-and-Water behaved more like Mazeppa's famous Tartar steed.

"Not much milk and water about him, after all," thought Mr. Mole ; "I begin to think he has been christened by the rules of contrary, on the same principle as a six-foot prize-fighter is called The Infant. Oh, dear, this is decidedly unpleasant. Oh, oh !"

It decidedly was, especially when the steed took to leaping over numerous fallen trunks or thick bushes, or edging so close against the trees that his rider had a difficulty in dodging in time to prevent being torn or dragged by the branches, and each of such perilous escapes perceptibly loosened the fastening that held him in his place.

In the wild hurry of the chase, the horsemen got often widely separated.

Milk-and-Water, entirely of his own accord, for his rider was to him a helpless burden, seemed determined to be ahead of the chase.

He shot on ahead of all his equine companions, and any spectator might have betted safely upon his being first at the winning-post.

"Oh, I say, isn't Mole going ahead?" exclaimed Jack, spying him from a distance.

"Or rather his horse is," replied Girdwood; "I don't believe the old boy's urging him on; more the other way."

"Bravo, Mole—you'll be first in the finish," shouted Jack, waving his hat, for he knew it was too far for his congratulations to be heard by their object.

Mole waved his cabbage-tree headgear in response, but in so doing, struck it against a tree with such violence, that not only was the hat hopelessly smashed, but his hand also received a knock that made him roar.

He bent forward, clutching the mane and reins with all his might, for he felt the straps that had fastened his boots to the girth snap altogether, and his only hope of keeping on lay in his arms and hands.

Thus again he urged on his wild career, the boots dangling loose in the stirrups in a manner ludicrous to others, but not pleasant to the sufferer.

And a sufferer Mr. Mole certainly was.

An hour and a half had this exciting chase continued.

The kangaroo was showing unmistakable signs of exhaustion, the dogs were gaining on him, and at length there was a wild shout of triumph from the huntsmen when they perceived the foremost hound had reached the quarry, which stood backed against a tree as if at bay.

"That's cooked him, I believe, my boys," cried Joe.

But it was not so yet; the kangaroo waited for his enemy to approach, and then simultaneously with the rush upon him, met the dog by upraising one of his hind feet.

With the long sharp claw, the boomah, now towering up to his six feet of height, ripped up the flank of the poor dog, which, with a dismal howl, rolled backwards on the sward, and expired.

The boomah then recommenced his flight, and ere the other dogs could come up, he was some distance beyond them.

"Oh, he's off towards the Wurree-Wurree River," said Joe, as he rode up to his companions; "he'll take to the water now. That's their last dodge, but it won't help him very much. I'm sorry for poor Ponto, though, and I shouldn't wonder if we lose another before we've done."

"By Jove! Look at Mole now," cried Harry Girdwood; "he seems determined to top us all in speed."

"Milk-and-Water certainly is a devil to go," said the stockman, gazing admiringly at that flying steed. "Up to this, I should always have laid odds on Wildfire, but Milky beats her."

Strange as it may seem, despite his perilous position, an exhilarated, triumphant, and ambitious feeling entered into Mole's heart.

He saw that he had distanced his companions, and he perceived that the kangaroo was nearing the water, where he would probably be at bay, and he saw not why he—even he, the unappreciated Isaac, should not be first in at the death, and even kill the kangaroo himself. It would be a glorious achievement, and one to talk of and enlarge upon for ever afterwards.

He had a knife and a pistol, and it was indeed hard that the suffering he had undergone during their terrible ride, should not be compensated by some triumph.

A fresh jerk of great violence, as his horse made a bound down hill, nearly unseated Mr. Mole in the midst of these rapid but inspiring reflections; and one of the jack-boots, knocked out of the stirrup by the same movement, slid off, leaving one of the timber toes exposed, and greatly increasing the rider's peril.

The glistening silver winding of the Wurree-Wurree River now hove in sight, and the kangaroo, closely pursued by the remaining dogs, was making towards it.

Arrived at the bank he made a mighty plunge, alighting about in the centre.

The dogs were after him in a moment and one swimming up to him, tried to fly at his throat, but the old man now firmly planted upright on his place of vantage, his fore feet and the upper part of his body rising above the water, received the attack with the boldness of desperation.

Gripping the dog with his claw, he struggled not only to prevent being fastened upon, but to get the head of his assailant under water.

This, after a few minutes' struggle, and some injuries inflicted by the dog, the boomah accomplished, and the gallant beast's head was kept under until he was suffocated by the object of his pursuit, who had only two dogs to contend with.

Mole had little time for calm observation.

Hurried along breathlessly after the dogs, jolted right and left, and hanging on only by a miracle, he arrived at the bank of the river, Jack and the others being still a considerable distance behind him.

All resolutions as to what he should do next were put a stop to by the independent action of Milk-and-Water.

That spirited steed evidently had no great liking for the latter element, for no sooner had he reached the bank, than resolving neither to enter the water nor to put up any longer with his useless rider, he made a halt so sudden, and kicked up hindward so vigorously, that Mr. Mole was jerked into the river as easily as a stone out of a sling.

He fell with a cry of alarm and surprise. The shock was all the more considerable as he was not prepared for it, and in fact for the moment he believed that he had had all the life knocked out of him.

In a few moments, however, he rose fully to the surface, and found himself within a few feet of where the kangaroo stood at bay, facing the remaining dogs.

Seeing the fate of their companions, these animals were rather chary of attacking their gigantic quarry, and indeed the boomah, now towering up as tall as a giraffe, at least in Mr. Mole's eyes, did look very formidable.

But the courage of Isaac at this sensational crisis reasserted itself, and he resolved to take the opportunity of killing the kangaroo, and covering himself with glory. Waving his knife with one hand, with the other, assisted by his wooden legs, he swam frog-fashion up to the creature, and when near enough, aimed a stroke at it with the long sharp knife.

But the kangaroo, taking him for another species of dog, or, at least, determined that, if possible, he should die in the same manner as the last assailant, began attacking him with his powerful fore feet.

In an instant the bosom of Mr. Mole's shirt was ripped up by the sharp claws of the kangaroo, and but for the undershirt, a deep wound would have been inflicted.

Then the infuriated animal fastened its claws on Mole's neck, and strove to get his head under water.

Mr. Mole was at his last gasp.

He never dreamt "the old man had so much blood in

him" (to quote our friend Macbeth), and he gave himself up for lost, and, regardless of valour, bawled out—

"Oh, why did I come hunting? Help, help!"

A report came from the pistol of young Jack, who, with his comrades, had now reached the bank.

With excellent aim—and it was a dangerous experiment, considering how closely Mole was struggling with the animal—Jack levelled at the kangaroo's head, and so well did the shot take effect, that in a moment the animal relaxed its hold on Mole, and rolled over dead in the water.

The intrepid Isaac, breathless and exhausted, was soon lifted out of the water by Joe and Jimalong, and dragged up the bank.

"You've had a narrow escape, my friend, I can tell you," said the stockman. "Whatever made you get so close to the boomah like that? Why, you have got the courage of a giant, sir. I know I shouldn't like to do it, for the critter's a devil at close quarters."

"For Heaven's sake a glass of rum," gasped Mole; "I'm dying."

"Lucky I've not come unprovided," said Joe, the stockman, taking a flask from his pocket and holding it to the lips of Mr. Mole, which closed upon it, and for several seconds held it tight by the force of suction.

"Now land the game, boys, and let's cut it up," said the stockman. "We've had fine sport, barring the loss of the dogs, who were worth more to me than a dozen boomahs."

Under the influence of his favourite remedy, combined with the geniality of the Australian sun, Mr. Mole was not very long in recovering from the effects of his ducking, his fright, and his exhaustion.

At all events he was able to take part in the species of picnic which followed.

It was a lovely and enjoyable scene, with the lofty forest trees towering above them.

Flocks of parrots chattered overhead, or flew whistling to and fro, their magnificent plumage glistening in the sunlight, and there was one bird, the organ magpie, that enlivened their picnic with a song as tuneful as that of a nightingale.

"This is delightful," said Mr. Mole, who still kept the rum bottle all to himself. He had mixed it with water

just to his own liking, though he drank out of the bottle. "Delightful—perfect paradise. Here's success to kangarooing."

"And to the health of the mighty hunter, Isaac Mole," returned Jack and Harry.

"And his horse, Milk-and-Water," added Joe, pointing to that animal, who was now tied up to a tree, and peacefully grazing.

"Well, I don't care what anybody says," protested the tutor. "I've done my duty as an Englishman. I consider I've won the honours of the day. Didn't I ride in front of all of you, and get in at the death first? Didn't I grapple with the monster in a death-struggle after he had killed two dogs, and finish him off with a blow of my knife?"

"Am not I the hero of the fight?" he added, after a pause.

"I rather fancy it was my shot that settled the kangaroo," said young Jack, quietly; "look, here's the mark where the bullet went through his head."

"Yes, but observe how his throat is gashed about," said the tutor. "I did that, at close quarters, and alone, my boy."

"More like where the dogs attacked him," said Joe; "you couldn't do much with your knife when we found you—much as you could do to keep your head above water—ha, ha?"

"Ah, well, for all you say, it was I that settled the kangaroo," said Mole, decisively, "and considering the size of the animal, and the run he gave us, that isn't so bad for the first day's sport for a new chum."

"A new chum!" exclaimed the stockman. "I thought you were an old hand, mate. Didn't you tell us you were over in the colony before?"

"I! When?" asked Mole, in surprise.

"Last night. You told us how you came over during the gold rush, and went to the diggings and got a nugget, and got robbed of it, and then went and captured two convicts with your own hands; don't you remember?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Isaac. "I never could have made any such statement."

"You certainly said so, though," said young Jack. "Didn't he, Harry!"

"Of course he did," acquiesced Harry Girdwood.

"You're having a joke on me, I see," said Mr. Mole, adjusting his spectacles. "If I said all that, I must have been suffering from *delirium tremens*, or——"

"Tea and brandy, *alias* Robur," supplied Jack.

"Hush, my boy, say no more, you hurt my feelings," said the tutor. "I fancy now that the tea was a little too strong. But, after all, the adventures I told you were all true, only they happened to a second cousin of mine, and not to myself."

"By that line of argumenting, friend," observed the stockrider, "you might describe how you won two great victories, and then say afterwards—'All this is quite true, only it didn't happen exactly to me, but the Duke of Wellington.'"

A laugh was raised by this application of Mr. Mole's sophistry, and he felt he was rather getting the worst of the joke.

"No matter," said he, "a day will come, as they say on the stage, or rather, a day has come—a day of triumph for Mole—Mole, the great kangaroo hunter. Behold, here is the ocular proof."

And he swung round him the huge tail of the slaughtered animal.

"Ask me not to part with it," he exclaimed, rising excitedly in an upright posture. "I wish I had full use of my legs, I'd get up and try a *pas de joie*, I feel so delighted. Isn't it a magnificent one?—six feet long at least. I'll keep it just as it is, so that nobody may doubt my statement as to the size of the quadruped it originally belonged to. I'll treasure it as my own life," he added, again swinging the formidable appendage in such a manner that Jack and Harry narrowly escaped getting a blow from it.

From this condition of exhilaration Mr. Mole passed to the opposite extreme of quiescence—in other words, he began to feel drowsy, and at last went off into a sound doze, with his back resting against a tree, the rum bottle in one hand and the kangaroo's tail in the other.

The others continued their conversation, when they were suddenly interrupted by a fearful sound proceeding from the thick forest behind them; it resembled the war-whoop of the American Indian tribes.

Simultaneously, a long spear came whizzing into the midst of the seated circle, grazing the shoulder of Joe, but fortunately sliding on to the grass without injuring any one.

"Natives!" exclaimed the stockman, starting to his feet; "look out, chums, they're upon us!"

Sure enough, a crowd of dark figures, tall, muscular, and nearly naked, with frizzly heads and negro features, burst from the dense forest upon the party.

Armed with spears, boomerangs, clubs, or waddies, these savages were evidently some of the most formidable and ferocious of their race.

The whites were on their feet in a moment—of course excepting Mr. Mole—and, drawing their pistols and knives, prepared for a fray, and a desperate battle succeeded.

The natives were recognised by the stockman as belonging to the Wurree-Wurree tribe, noted for being a scourge to the white settlers for their cattle-stealing propensities.

Instigated partly by hatred to the white men, but still more by a desire to possess themselves of the kangaroo they had killed, and if possible some of the horses (which they used not for riding, but for cooking and eating), they had made this sudden attack on the unprepared party of picnickers.

Without firearms, it might be thought that the blacks stood no chance against the whites, but they so far outnumbered the attacked party, and were so dexterous with the spear, waddy, and boomerang, that the odds were nearly on their own side.

Many shots were fired, and seven of the savages fell dead or wounded, but Joe Freeman and his friends soon found that the game was against them.

At first the natives appeared to be easily driven off, but no sooner were they out of sight, than, sheltered by the trees, they deluged the whites with such a shower of spears and boomerangs, that it was only by a miracle they all escaped killing.

Pistols seemed useless against these agile savages, who seemed able to dodge bullets as easily as spears.

Jimalong, the "tame black" stockman, evidently considering "discretion the better part of valour," made off



"MOLE GRASPED HIS RUM BOTTLE TO DEFEND HIMSELF."

at the beginning of the fray, though the two dogs, who seemed to delight in the scene, remained to take part in it.

At length, all the ammunition being exhausted, Joe Freeman saw that further fight was useless, so he shouted to his companions to make for the horses before the natives could capture those animals.

All were in the saddle in a moment (always excepting our friend Mole), and to lighten weight, the remains of the kangaroo were left behind, and the natives pounced upon them with a howl of triumph.

The whites immediately spurred on their horses, the natives giving chase, yelling, screaming, and leaping, and hurling their missiles after them until they were out of sight.

In this wild stampede—for which our friends can scarcely be blamed, for to stay longer would have been certain death—the redoubted steed Milk-and-Water was, like his master, left behind.

The natives thought they had got a prize in this fine animal, but no sooner did they untie the rope that fastened him, than he gave a mighty plunge, sent two of his would-be possessors sprawling, and set off homeward through the forest at a pace that rendered his capture hopeless.

The only remnant of the hunting party now left behind on the scene of action, was the unfortunate tutor, Isaac Mole.

It is needless to say that Mr. Mole had been long ere this thoroughly roused from his peaceful slumbers by the tumult going on around him.

For him to join in the fray was impossible; he could not then rise to his feet; all he could do was to bawl out loudly for assistance.

Never in all his wanderings did he feel more terror than when, as he lay thus helpless under the tree, he saw the whole lot of them, intoxicated with their triumph over the white fellows, and their gallant capture of the boomah and a half empty brandy bottle, come dancing around him.

They yelled, they screeched, they made hideous grimaces, they joined in a savage chant, of which "Yah-lah-roo!" was apparently the chorus, and seemed determined to do their utmost to frighten old Mole to death.

This was not, however, the worst he anticipated, for he had heard terrible stories of the cannibalism of the natives, and beheld with a shudder the formidable grinders of the chief and his followers.

Not that we imagine that the spectacle of old Mole, with his wooden legs, his spectacles, and his scared and ghostly countenance was particularly appetising even to the cannibal mind, but he feared the worst, and grasped his kangaroo tail in one hand, and his rum bottle with the other, to defend himself with, if need were.

The wooden legs seemed to astonish the natives a great deal; they had never seen any thing like them before, and they probably regarded the tutor as some sort of white monstrosity.

He endeavoured by signs to make them understand his particular infirmity, and also to implore their pity, and to make himself better understood, addressed them in a kind of nigger, or broken English.

But this failed to make them "comprenny," and they jabbered away in their own tongue at a considerable rate as they crowded around them, pinched, poked, and prodded his wooden legs, and tried to account for the phenomenon in their own way.

"Oh, Lor'," exclaimed Isaac to himself; "here's a fix! I wish I had a wooden body as well as legs, for then I shouldn't be able to feel the tortures I know they mean me to go through, and if they took to eat me, I should disagree with them.

"My good friends, niggers, men and brudders, please leab me alone. I no good to chaw-chaw at all, and you can have my two timber pins, since you've taken such a fancy to 'em, if you'll only spare my life."

"Kur-rur-wan-ran-kan!" was the chief's only reply to this appeal, and the words seemed to mean "lift him up and carry him to our tents," for that is what two natives, one taking Mr. Mole by the shoulders, the other lifting up the wooden legs, immediately proceeded to do.

One hungry-looking savage, with formidable teeth, made a sharp bite at one of poor Mole's wooden legs, but did not seem to relish the flavour.

It was no use to struggle; he was as helpless as an infant in their hands, and he could only appeal more loudly than before to their sense of compassion.

This, however, proved to be equally unavailing.

He was carried off into the woods by his captors.

The chief looking and gazing reflectively at the two new crutches which Mr. Mole had left under the tree.

The savage evidently thought they were some sort of weapons, but whether of the nature of a gun, a club, or a spear, he could not make up his mind.

Poor Mr. Mole's rum bottle, with all its delicious contents, for he had not drunk half of it, fell as a trophy into the hands of the chief.

The group of tents, or "gunyahs," appertaining to the Wurree-Wurree tribe was situated in a very wild gully or valley.

It was a wild and picturesque spot, but Mr. Mole was in no position to appreciate its beauties, which came upon his vision more in an upside down view than otherwise.

For his bearers carried him—especially down hill—with his head hanging much lower than his feet would have been if he had had any.

A crowd of natives of all kinds, men, women, and children, surrounded the captive as soon as he arrived at the tents, and danced round him, yelling, grinning, and altogether conducting themselves, in Mole's own words, as if they were not natives of Australia, but of Van Demon's Land.

This joke was perpetrated by Mr. Mole in describing the scene afterwards, for he was in no jesting mood at the time.

His firm belief then was that they intended to have him for supper, and that their "Yah-lah-roo" was a chorus of delight at the prospect of eating a white man, and that his arrival was hailed as if he were provisions brought into the camp.

And the alacrity with which the natives began kindling a fire, evidently for cooking purposes, made him feel faint.

"This is queer treatment for a man who has graduated at an English University," moaned the tutor, as he lay thus. "Strange beings; they have let me keep my kangaroo tail. I should have thought they would have wanted it for soup. But I'll only part with it with my life, unless I can't help myself. Bless me, what's that smell of cooking?"

By moving a little, he was able to see through a hole

in the tent, and then perceived in the open space the natives engaged at their feast.

They had kindled a large fire, and were squatting round it.

The kangaroo haunch, cut up into huge steaks, was being grilled, or rather burnt, over the embers.

These children of nature were too impatient to wait until the meat was done through.

No sooner was it a little browned than they took it up, and gnawed some off as it was, and then put it back again to cook a little more.

This seemed to Mr. Mole a new and original way of dining.

It was with a pang of deep regret that Mr. Mole saw his favourite rum bottle being passed round from the chief to the warriors whom he most favoured.

As the natives were thus enjoying themselves, their jabbering tones were gradually stilled.

This comparative stillness, combined with the heat of the day, was so lulling to Mr. Mole, that in a short time he actually went off into a doze, which imperceptibly became a deep slumber.

CHAPTER XX.

A LADY FALLS IN LOVE WITH MOLE AND PROPOSES.

HE was at length awakened by strange voices close to him, and found by the position of the sun that it was late in the day.

He still lay on a 'possum skin in the tent, and a group of natives were peering in at him grinning at the entrance.

Then it was that he first experienced a sense of loss, and next, to his inexpressible grief, realised what he had lost.

It was his kangaroo's tail!

"My tail, my kangaroo's tail, my trophy of the chase, and only memento of this glorious day!" he exclaimed, sitting up; "who has taken it?"

The only reply was a shout of "Cobbon, cobbon; good, good!" from the blacks outside, who seemed to

regard these excited observations with just the same delight as a child would the first speech of a parrot he was teaching.

"Where's my kangaroo tail?" shouted Mole; "do you understand? My kan-ga-roo tail."

Here the chief, for whom the other natives all made way, popped his woolly head, adorned with cockatoo's feathers, in at the entrance, and said with a wide grin—

"Burra, burra, wa goo, tee-lang."

"Just so," said Mr. Mole; "I fully agree with your remark, only it don't enlighten me as to what end my tail has come to."

And he called out again—

"My kangaroo tail," louder than ever.

To which the chief replied, pointing suggestively down his own throat—

"Kan-ga-roo tail soup."

"Oh, it's made into soup, is it?" said Mole. "Well, it was a mean thing to come and take it from me when I was asleep; I ought to have had a voice in the matter. I should like to have some of it, at any rate. I'm getting rather hungry again; bring me some kangaroo-tail soup," he added, with a gesture eloquently expressive of swallowing.

"Kan-ga-roo tail soup," echoed the chief, and now evidently understanding him. "Yowi, Yowi."

And he gave orders to his subordinates that the delicacy should be brought.

Instantly a particularly ugly native, bearing a mighty cauldron, probably stolen from some settler's hut, entered, and approached Mole, the chief and several other warriors accompanying him.

"What's this?" cried Mole, looking in vain for the hot soup he expected.

For he saw nothing but a sediment of dark brown gelatinous substance, sticking to the bottom and edges, inside the pot, in which the marks of fingers were plainly visible.

It might have been humanly possible to scrape up a few mouthfuls of the horrid mess, but who was going to do it?

"Take it away," he cried, with a gesture of disgust. "The greedy savages, they've eaten it all, and licked

and clawed the saucepan so dry, that there's not much more than the smell left, and now they offer it to a white man. Ugh ! perish the thought."

"Mor-ro-bung-keen !" observed the chief, grinning, and then he disappeared for a moment, and brought in a little wiry black, whose appearance and actions reminded Mole forcibly of his friend Nero.

"I'm Billygolong," he remarked, "tame black fellow ; spick white man's lingo."

"Do you?" exclaimed Mole. "I'm glad of it ; perhaps you'll be able to answer me a few questions. Do your tribe, yon black fellows—Wurree warriors—ahem !—ever eat white man?"

"Ole chief," he said, "eat 'em up ; other ole chief alive, he eat kangaroo."

"Well, that is an improvement, I must say," observed Mole ; "to give up cannibalism is a decided step in the path of civilisation. Won't your people let me go?"

"We gib up white mans," answered Billygolong, "if other white mans gib us sheep and bullocks."

"Oh, I see, I am to be kept as a sort of hostage till I am ransomed ; just like those villainous brigands do in Greece. Who would have thought these black rascals had so much cunning ? Do you always treat white men well?" he asked, doubtfully.

"We kill some, and eat 'em," answered the native, with a grin, "if we don't get bullocks and sheep."

"The devil you do ; I'm in danger of my life, after all. What can be done ? I must say some thing to frighten them."

"Look here, you black fellow, it won't do for any thing to happen to me here. Do you know who I am?"

The savage shook his head.

"I'm Lord Mole, chief medicine-man to the great white Queen of England ; legs cut off in battle by Russian boom-erangs. If queen finds you kill her medicine-man, she'll send hundreds—thousands white men, with thundersticks, and kill all black men ; there !"

"Yowi !" exclaimed the native, evidently impressed by his threat, which he immediately communicated to the chief, who had some time before entered the tent with a coloured lady of the tribe.

The chief, fully believing the exalted rank to which his

prisoner laid claim, was resolved to increase the ransom he had intended claiming, but at the same time to take care of their captive and use him well.

It did not follow, however, that the means taken to do this were such as must please the object of their kindness. Mr. Mole soon found that their well-meant efforts were destined to place him in rather embarrassing positions.

In the first place, the native lady, who was the chief's sister, seemed inclined to pay him particular, though unwelcome attentions.

She could speak English about as well as Billygolong, and by this means was enabled to make her sentiments known to the captive, and also to overwhelm him with questions, which he could not always understand, and generally found a difficulty in answering.

"Me like white mans," she observed, with a look of tenderness that made Mr. Mole feel nervous. "Me marry once to black chief, he ill-treat me; beat me with waddy, till another black man speared him in forest, and he dead."

"A widow, by Jove!" exclaimed Mole. "This is worse than all. Good gracious! the idea of my being at her mercy," and he gazed with awe upon her.

Truth to tell, the female aborigine is seldom very attractive in appearance, and if Kobba-wobba (that was her name) ever were so, it must have been a very, very long time ago.

She was tall, gaunt, and hard-featured, with a ring through her nose, and a mouth capacious enough to show that she had lost half her teeth at least, and what remained were as black as ebony, while as her attire consisted principally in a 'possum-skin cloak, which had seen considerable service, she was not assisted much by the advantages of the toilette.

"Me like white mans better than black mans," she repeated emphatically; "black mans beat lubras with waddy, white treat lubras kind, not beat them."

"Don't they, though?" returned Mole. "I rather doubt it; there's plenty of wife-beating in some parts of England, by all accounts."

"So," proceeded Kobba-wobba, with still greater emphasis, "me wish a good deal to be lubra of great medicine man, of great Queen of Whiteland."

"That's rather cool for this hot climate," said Mole to himself. "Madam, I grieve to say that circumstances render it impossible that—bless me! what am I talking about?—the fact is, Kobba-wobba, I couldn't marry you; I have one, two, three lubras already."

"White lubras?" she asked, anxiously.

"Black, nigger black, though they're not natives here; but if they thought I even dreamed of looking out for you, they'd murder me and you as well if they got the chance."

Kobba-wobba still asserted her preference for a white husband.

Mr. Mole determined to humour this impressicn.

"I think I know of a white man that will suit you exactly. He is very young, great warrior, wonderfully handsome, with whiskers of golden colour, great chief of the white queen's army—much money, red coat covered with gold."

"That good," said Kobba-wobba, with much satisfaction, "that very good; what his name?"

"General Walker," replied Mole. "He's a particular friend of mine."

"Waw-ker? Me remember dat; where he stop now?"

"Well, he's some distance; but, if you'll do all you can to get me well treated by the chief while I'm here, and persuade him to let me go, I'll find him out as soon as ever I get free, and send him to you."

The effect of this agreeable fiction upon the simple savage was very conciliating, and Mole was glad to find he had made a friend of Kobba-wobba, as well as of her brother, the chief, who, by the way, rejoiced in the high-sounding epithet of Kul-la-ba-long-tee-boo.

Mr. Mole's appetite returning after a time, he wished very much that the natives would bring him something palatable.

The desire he expressed to Billygolong, who responded—

"Iss, gone to get some; see black chief come, bringing some thing a good deal nicer for white man."

And Mole saw the chief again entering the tent, carrying a tin dish containing some thing of strange shape and colour, smoking hot, and slightly resembling small sausages.

"Thanks; but what is it?" asked Mole, raising him-

self into a sitting posture, and with a look of distrust. "Heaven! why, it looks like——"

"Nice fat young snakes, roasted," explained Kobba-wobba; "chief got 'em from under his large gum tree; beau'ful, nice as kangaroo."

Sure enough, Mr. Mole realised, to his horror, that the contents of the tin dish were about half a dozen large sections of the juvenile serpent, browned over the fire, giving forth a savour not unpleasant, but most repulsive in idea.

Mr. Mole actually fancied he saw them writhing about as if they were alive.

"So nice," exclaimed Kobba-wobba, holding them towards Mole, and turning them over with a knife.

"Ugh! take it away," cried he, scowling in horror.

The black looked surprised; he was rejecting what was considered a great delicacy by the Australian natives, and the chief had himself taken considerable trouble to catch and kill a snake for the purpose of giving their guest a treat.

He could not understand the objection to the delicious food which "goes down like marrow" in the opinion of the native epicures, and could only suppose that Mr. Mole was merely standing on ceremony, and wanted a little coaxing, which he left to the feminine blandishments of Kobba-wobba.

"Come, must eat it, white man," said she persuasively, selecting the largest piece; "eat all up quick, nicer than 'possum, or quail, or sheep flesh; black fellow eat many, many."

"Let 'em," almost shrieked Mole, "but I can't; I'll die of hunger first; take the horrid thing away."

Not only persuasion, but force was now employed, for, by the direction of the chief, Billygolong held firmly the head of the unfortunate Mole, while Kobba-wobba proceeded to feed him.

On seeing the loathsome object so near him, Mr. Mole struggled, tried to push back the hand that held it, but the chief, seizing his arm, prevented this.

Mole closed his eyes in horror, and opened his mouth to give vent to ejaculations of disgust.

This was the very worst thing he could do, for it gave the chieftainess an opportunity.

As soon as he felt the hot meat touch his palate, he gave a complete shriek of horror.

"Phew!" he spluttered out, "I won't eat it. Murder! help! I shall be choked, poisoned!"

And with a violent effort he succeeded in ridding himself of the nauseous mouthful, just in time to prevent it slipping down his throat.

"Oh, I'm so sick!" he cried, "can't eat snake, snake kill white man. If I eat it I shall die at once."

Kobba-wobba's compassion was now so far aroused, that she desisted in her efforts, and gave the dish of delicacies back to the chief, who received it with evident reluctance.

Billygolong, who seemed to be a recognised "snapper-up of unconsidered trifles," pounced upon the rejected snake as it lay upon the ground, threw back his head, and swallowed each piece at a gulp, much as a white man would an oyster.

The chief now went out to find some other food, that might better recommend itself to the taste of the white fellow.

What could be more delicious and acceptable than a fine iguana, or eatable lizard?

They abounded in that neighbourhood, and could be killed and cooked in a very short time.

There was one crawling up one of the gum trees; down he must come.

Kul-la-ba-long-tee-boo took aim, and threw his boomerang gently; it went about fifty feet into the air, whirled round, and descended, whizzing, close to the tree, and bringing down the lizard with it.

A sable warrior ran to pick it up, and handed it to the chief, who ended its dying agonies with his knife, prepared it for cooking, stuck a skewer through it, and then gave directions for it to be grilled over the fire.

It was not long before this new delicacy was brought in whole to the hungry tutor; but hungry as he was, he was not quite far gone enough to "tackle" the unpleasant object before him.

He had heard of the delicacy before, and saw no reason but prejudice why it should not be really good eating; but, when he saw this specimen of the ugly reptile, looking for all the world like a young crocodile, his

antipathy was so great that he could no more touch it than he could the worm.

"Pah! away with it!" he cried. "What will these savages be bringing me next, I wonder? Broiled nigger, I expect!" and then, looking round, and feeling the necessity of conciliating his sable friends, he said—

"No, no; too rich; too good for white man. White man ill, stomach weak, die if he eat lizard."

The chief murmured; he was beginning to be tired of this.

This second refusal was too much.

It was "the last straw that broke the camel's back" of his patience.

For the last half hour he had been trying to please a man, who seemed determined not to be pleased.

The idea of anyone who would not eat snake and who would not eat lizard!

What would he eat?

Didn't he deserve to be left to starve?

Kul-la-ba-long-tee-boo, however, resolved to give Mole one last chance for his life.

Yes, Mole should have one more chance—one more dainty dish should be provided for the white man, and if he could not eat that, he might starve.

It was now getting towards night, and the wild denizens of the forest were beginning to think of rest.

Flocks of parrots, and other birds, were returning homewards, flying over the trees close to the tents.

The chief, scarcely moving from the entrance of his tent, stood watching a large body of these parrots, until they were close over his head, and then hurled his boomerang into the midst of them.

The whole flock flew off, screaming in a deafening manner, but one parrot came fluttering to the ground, struck by the sharp missile.

A native boy picked up the fallen game, and brought it to the chief, who, by way of recompense, handed the cooked lizard to the lad, who proceeded, with one of his companions, delightedly to devour it.

The bird was then plucked, drawn, and cooked, and Mr. Mole was at last gratified by a smoking dish of roasted parrot.

He contrived to enjoy it very much, and the natives

took such a great interest in the affair, that a number of them crowded around him all the time, jabbering and gesticulating in a manner almost enough to frighten away a white man's appetite altogether.

But Mr. Mole was becoming hardened under such influences.

By this time it was night, and the moon shone overhead, but it was often clouded.

But the large fire of logs gave such a spreading and ruddy glow that all the gunyahs were more or less illuminated by its beams.

By this light Mole was enabled to perceive that a considerable amount of bustle and preparation was going on in the camp, and the sable warriors seemed particularly attentive to their weapons and their own personal adornment.

"What is going to happen now, Billygolong!" asked the prisoner of that agile attendant.

"Grand corroboree," replied he; "black fellows dance and fight, and do big jumps."

"Ah! I've often thought I should like to see a corroboree," cried Mole; "I understand they paint themselves before they dance."

"Iss, iss, paint very much," replied the savage.

Kul-la-ba-long-tee-boo just then entered the tent, carrying a species of palette, formed of the bottom of an old tin can, on which were a variety of mysterious pigments, and a sort of reed that served as a paint-brush.

The aboriginal warrior threw aside his opossum cloak, and appeared with his finely-proportioned and slightly-tattooed form uncovered, save by a broad girdle of kangaroo skin.

In this condition he commenced besmearing himself with some of the paint first.

He enlivened the proceeding with an eccentric dance, perhaps in order to make the paint dry quicker; and, when the first coat was set, he touched it up with some dabs of a livelier colour.

At this stage, Kobbawobba was called in to put the finishing touches with a delicate brush, formed from the paw of the kangaroo rat.

Mr. Mole watched these operations with considerable interest, reflecting what an amount of trouble people,

both savage and civilised, are apt to take in order to make themselves look hideous and unnatural.

But all his cogitations were upset, when he perceived the object of his regard coming towards him, accompanied by Kobba-wobba, with the brush and palette in her hands.

"Now white man's turn," she said; "paint all over, and look much pretty."

"Heaven! you don't intend to adorn me in that style, I hope!" cried Mole.

"Iss, iss!" said Billygolong; "chief say white man must put on paint for grand corroboree."

"But I can't take part in the corroboree," protested the tutor. "I'm not a native; I'm an outsider, and, besides, how can I dance without any legs?"

All his objections, however, did not move his captor.

He ordered Billygolong to hold him, whilst he himself stood ready to assist with his mighty strength in bringing the prisoner to reason.

But Kobba-wobba, as soon as Mole was seated, stripped to the waist and securely held in the clutches of Billygolong, behaved in a manner that surprised her native friends.

She thrust her painting materials into the hands of the chief, and fell on her knees at the feet of Mr. Mole—or rather where the feet of Mr. Mole should have been, for it was the strange absence of those extremities that excited the admiration of Kobba-wobba.

She lifted both wooden legs with such haste that poor Mole was nearly thrown backwards, and in great alarm shrieked out—

"What are you doing, woman? Don't kill me."

"No kill, much lub. How you get wood feet? You much bery big chief; much dance wid strong leg—not get tired."

"I am tired of this kind of life," groaned Mole, in bitterness of spirit, for while Kobba-wobba was admiring his legs, the chief had commenced putting a fresh coat of paint on the white man's chest.

"You lub Kobba-wobba?" asked the woman, with a sigh.

"No!"

"You try—hab Kobba-wobba for lubra—what you call

wife ; den we hab piccaninnies wid stick legs all same as great white chief."

"I won't!—I forbid the bans! I've been married a great deal too much in my lifetime, and I call you all to witness I'll never marry that woman."

"I paint you much beau'ful—den you lub me."

"Never!—and I won't be painted," cried Mr. Mole.

However, it was decided that Mr. Mole *must* be painted at all risks.

Objections were useless, only serving to irritate his captors, and render them more violent.

The chief went all over Mole's chest, arms, and back with his large brush, which he dipped in the glutinous kind of black paint.

He was obliged to submit to being daubed over with this material till his whole complexion seemed changed.

Actors have assured us that nothing is more unpleasant than painting and glueing their faces preparatory for pantomime or burlesque make-up ; what must Mr. Mole, then, have felt when not only his face, but his body and arms, were thus encrusted with an offensive pigment?

He narrowly escaped getting some in his eyes, and when the operation was completed, and he was held up to dry, he experienced a sensation of mental and bodily anguish which outdid all his previous experiences.

The coat of paint did not take long to get dry, and then it felt as stiff and uncomfortable as a suit of armour, and Mole the warrior could hardly move.

But his tortures had not ended yet ; as soon as it was ascertained that the coating had set, that female artist, Kobba-wobba, stepped forward and commenced adorning Mr. Mole's unfortunate carcase and countenance with a choice pattern of her own invention, in no less than four bright colours.

Isaac submitted to this operation with all the fortitude at his command, though his modesty was shocked.

Kobba-wobba, on the contrary, seemed delighted with the task, and gave her client such a variety of elaborate embellishments, that he declared, when it was done, he felt and looked exactly like a newly-hung wall-paper.

All the time the sable lady was going into exclamations of delight at the beauty of her own work, and when com-

pleted, she was in such an ecstasy of delight and pride that she finally threw down her implements and danced with joy, exclaiming—

“*Cobbon cobbon!* Good, good!”

“I wish you felt like I do, old girl,” said Mole, “and you’d be more likely to say bad, very bad. Well, if this isn’t a world of suffering! Ah, what is coming now?”

The chief entered, with an enormous head-dress, in the form of a wig, evidently manufactured from the frizzly heads of some slain enemies, crested with a plume of parrot’s feathers.

This they fixed on Mr. Mole’s head, by tying it under his chin.

An opossum cloak was thrown over him, and he was lifted on an old wooden chair, probably stolen from some settler’s hut.

In this guise the tutor, now to all appearance a superannuated native, was carried out of doors and set down under the gum trees with the other spectators who had assembled to witness the corroboree, Billygolong still by his side to guard him.

The tribe began with a series of shrill yells, accompanied by violent gesticulations, beating of drums, the clatter of sticks together, and the whizzing in the air of pieces of wood fastened to a string.

This was the overture, and a very hideous and discordant one it was.

After that, the first party of performers rushed in with a wild war-whoop, and commenced dancing round the fire.

Never had the venerable Isaac Mole, in the whole course of his experience, seen such dancing or such dancers.

With clubs in one hand, and boomerangs in the other, the sable warriors capered round and round and to and fro, sometimes like street niggers in a breakdown, sometimes as wildly as the dancing dervishes of Persia, and sometimes, oftener than all, like lunatics, or the witches in “*Macbeth*.”

Then the savages, after a short interval, began again, increased in numbers by another party, whom they soon engaged in a spirited sham-fight.

With a yell of defiance and a loud clatter of weapons, the two parties rushed together in close action.

From the fierceness of their manner and speech, Mr. Mole supposed that they really had quarrelled, and intended to have it out to the death.

At length one party of combatants had to give way ; they were driven from the field, and their opponents pursued them with yells of triumph.

Both soon disappeared in the darkness of the forest, but sounds of shrieks and groans, blows and clashing of weapons convinced Mr. Mole that a fearful massacre was going on out of sight.

"Good gracious !" he exclaimed, "is that the way you black fellows have a friendly dance, by pitching into each other in this murderous style ?"

"*Powi*, iss, iss," answered Billygolong, with a wide grin, "always so at a corroboree ; but don't kill-kill ; only make believe."

"It's too much like reality, though, for my taste," mused Mole, "and I shouldn't much care about being in the thick of the battle. Hallo, here they are again, and they don't seem much damaged either. I wish I could run away."

"Great kangaroo dance come nex'," observed Billygolong, who was as good as a programme.

The whole body of the warriors now reappeared, having apparently made up their quarrel without bloodshed, and commenced some fresh gambols.

The men threw aside their weapons, drew up their arms into the smallest compass, and commenced hopping like kangaroos.

The imitation was wonderfully lifelike, and the immense leaps taken by each didn't fall far short of those performed by the genuine animal.

Mr. Mole was reminded of his recent hunting achievements.

These personators of the kangaroo, to render the thing more natural, had tufts of grass in their mouths, on which they pretended to be quietly feeding when they were disturbed by the other warriors, armed, and hopped away in a manner wonderfully true to nature.

Hitherto, not more than half of the force of the tribe had engaged in the revels, the remainder being seated among the spectators under the trees, wrapped in their opossum cloaks.

Suddenly, at a thundering signal on the drum, these started up, threw aside their cloaks, and with a wild "Whroo! Whroo!" began a demoniac witches' dance round the fire.

Mr. Mole gave an exclamation of astonishment at their ghastly appearance, for they had painted ribs and bones, in white, upon their bodies and limbs, which, by the darkness of the background, gave them just the aspect of a lot of animated skeletons.

"Dead man's dance," exclaimed Billygolong. "Dat am splendid."

"Bless my soul; what an idea," exclaimed Mole. "Puts me in mind of Holbein's Dance of Death, in which I remember——"

But at this moment he felt himself seized behind, and, ere he could object, he and his chair were lifted aloft on the shoulders of four stalwart aborigines.

"Here, I say," cried Mole, "you'll break my neck; do please be careful."

The savages then carried him toward the fire.

Not doubting that they intended to offer him up as a burnt sacrifice, Mole objected strongly by a series of passionate protestations.

"My good-looking friend, what are you about, pray? Understand I object to being burnt; let me down; I'm a freeborn Englishman; let me down, I say."

His words were drowned in the yells and shouts of barbarous triumph that rang from all sides; his struggle was in vain, and as he was carried more than five feet from the ground—a distance, to fall, which would seriously damage a wooden-legged man—Isaac felt that the best thing he could do was to hold on to his seat.

The natives underneath commenced a wild dance, which had the effect of making Mr. Mole feel as if he were mounted on a kangaroo or giraffe, or out at sea in a washing-tub during a storm.

How he managed to keep his seat was a mystery.

The music struck up louder than ever.

Every sitting warrior rose, like a giant refreshed, and commenced fresh gambols; the old chief, with the bound of a kangaroo, suddenly leaped into the circle of the dancers brandishing his powerful waddy, and shouting—"Yal-lul-lu-bah!"

Mr. Mole was carried round and round the huge camp-fire till he felt quite giddy, and expected every moment that they intended to tilt him into it and burn him like an Australian Guy Fawkes.

It was, at least, evident that this part of the performance was meant for his especial behoof, for the wild songs and yells were directed towards himself.

For a considerable time his bearers stood still, holding him as high up as they could, whilst all the others danced round.

No one, ever acquainted with our old friend Isaac, could possibly have recognised him as he looked on that memorable occasion.

Black all over the face and body, with crescents, stars, and stripes in white and red ochre and an enormous woolly wig crested with feathers, and an opossum cloak concealing his lower extremities, he sat, the centre of attraction to a group of yelling and dancing savages, in the red glare of the forest fire.

Isaac Mole indeed? Why, he looked far more like the great Panjandrum himself, with all his worshippers around him.

"I do believe they take me for some white divinity," he thought, "and are chanting hymns of praise to their idol. Misguided beings!"

His bearers now set into motion again, and recommenced a rapid walk round the fire.

It grew into a run, and then to a gallop.

Every moment Mr. Mole expected to be pitched out of his seat, while the deafening discord in his ears, the wild scene before him, fright and the rapidity of the jolting motion, almost drove him distracted.

At length he felt he could endure it no longer.

The chair jolted till it was impossible to retain his hold, and with a cry of horror out he fell on to the ground, close to the fire.

In a moment he felt his woolly wig in a blaze.

Poor Mole gave himself up for lost.

But a black fellow promptly extinguished the flame of the burning head-dress, and then he was once more seated under the gum-tree.

That was Mr. Mole's last ordeal that night for the sav-

ages were tired out with their exertions, and throwing themselves round the fire, soon fell asleep.

Mr. Mole quickly followed their example.

How long he had slept, he knew not, but he was awakened by a hand being placed firmly over his mouth.

"Hush! not a word, if you value your life," whispered the owner of the hand. "It's Harry, who has come back with Jack and the stockman to save you."

Then a moment afterwards came the words—

"Rise up and walk between us as quietly as a cat on velvet."

Mole obeyed, and, luckily, was too bewildered to speak or make any outcry.

He rubbed his eyes and looked.

Yes, there sure enough were the two boys; and two paces off the stockman, with a brace of loaded revolvers in his hands.

Quietly as possible they walked till they were quite a hundred yards from the camp.

There they found half-a-dozen other well-armed men, who had been collected by Jack's friends to rescue the white prisoner.

They had even prepared a horse for Mr. Mole, with another pair of boots for his unlucky wooden legs to be inserted in. Mount and away was the word.

But unluckily, before Mr. Mole could be properly fixed in the saddle, one of the horses gave a loud neigh.

The natives heard it, and with loud yells started in pursuit.

"Make haste, sir. Up with you."

The savages were in sight now, for the moon had risen and as soon as they saw the white party, they commenced to throw boomerangs and spears.

But a few shots checked their advance, and Mole having been "fixed," away went the whites, soon leaving the savages behind.

After a ride of three hours they reached a station where, after a hearty laugh at Mole's paint, he was cleansed and supplied with garments. They rested till daylight, and then, after a hearty breakfast, started for the Harkaway settlement.

The relation of their adventures caused some excitement there, and the description of Mole in his war-paint was a theme of mirth for many a day.

CHAPTER XXI.

ROOK'S TROUBLES—MORGAN AGAIN—A DESPERATE PLAN—TINKER VANISHES LEAVING ROOK IN TROUBLE—HOW HILDA WAS CARRIED OFF.

WE will now look after old friend Jack and his party in their new camp.

All went well, and everybody looked happy, and hopefully regarded the future.

Everybody but one man.

Rook!

He had weighty matters upon his conscience.

Harkaway had given him a splendid chance of beginning life again and redeeming the past.

How had he profited by it?

In a way that made him feel ready to put the muzzle of his rifle into his mouth and blow his brains out.

He had acted as a fool as well as a traitor.

"When I think that I was idiot enough to listen to Morgan," he muttered, as he walked along by the river's bank, "when I reflect on the shallow trap into which I fell, I could put an end to myself."

"Yah, yah!"

A low, nigger chuckle came from the shrubs skirting the river, and out popped Tinker.

"Morning, Massa Rook," said Tinker, nodding gaily.

"Rather late for morning, Tinker," returned Rook, giving him a sharp, scrutinising glance.

"Yes, yes," said Tinker, looking down thoughtfully.

And then suddenly looking up, he faced Rook, and said—

"Nice man Captain Morgan."

Rook started.

"Morgan! How should I know?"

Tinker chuckled.

"You know bery well, I know bery well."

"What!" said Rook, to himself, "is it possible that this nigger is one of Morgan's spies in the camp, all this while?—oh, impossible."

"Massa Morgan coming presently; he come to frighten old Mole—yah, yah!"

"I don't know Morgan, nor any thing about him," returned Rook, coldly, "and I don't want to know him."

"Oh, yes, sar, you do; you know all about him, you know well; him robber, bushranger."

And he nodded with such significance, that Rook began to feel uncomfortable.

He reflected awhile.

A hundred thoughts chased each other through his mind at once.

"I'll go to Mr. Harkaway and tell him every thing," he said; "he'll forgive me again, I know well. He'll help me to keep straight, he'll——"

"Oh, golly!" cried Tinker, suddenly, and disappeared.

Two men had crept from behind the trees before Rook could perceive them, and stood before him.

Their appearance was so sudden that he was considerably startled.

Yet not more so than when he recognised their voices.

"Rook," said the nearest to him.

"Captain Morgan."

"Quite an unexpected meeting, is it not?" said the notorious bushranger, with a quiet smile. "We have lost sight of you of late. What is the best news?"

Rook hung his head, but made no answer to this.

"Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," returned the ex-convict, coldly; "but I have no news to give you."

"Indeed," said Morgan, gaily; "what a precious slow place this must be for one of your sort."

Rook beat the ground impatiently with his foot for several minutes, while he summoned up courage.

At length he burst out—

"You must not look to me for assistance any more," he said, violently. "These people have shown me all sorts of kindness and I will not betray them."

Morgan frowned.

"Hold your mutinous tongue, Rook!" he said, in a voice which made the ex-convict feel very uncomfortable. "If I see any signs of disaffection amongst my people, I have a swift and sure means at command for putting an end to it."

Rook glanced round.

Morgan had got a revolver pointed at him.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, faintly ; "I owe you no allegiance."

The bushranger gave a hoarse laugh.

"No allegiance!" he cried ; "why, what do you mean, confound you! Why, I must be growing patient in my old age. I've put a bullet into many a man before now for less than that."

Rook made no reply.

The captain of the bushrangers had a trick of manner about him which cowed the ex-convict.

And Morgan knew it.

He knew well that he held the power over him which a strong mind always exercises over a weak.

"Look you here, Master Rook," said he, after awhile, "you are a simpleton, and you're young in my service, so I overlook what you have said. But I have this to tell you, and you will please look upon my words as orders, not to be lightly played with."

A retort rose to the ex-convict's lips, but he repressed it.

"I haven't depended upon your assistance alone here ; I have others in the settlement upon whom I rely for information."

"Spies?"

"Eh!"

"Others," said Rook, with a start ; "who can it be?"

"That is my business ; I have my spies, as you are rude enough to call them. Well, it pleases me to fancy the good looks of Mrs. Harvey."

"Who?"

"The beautiful Hilda. Well, within a few minutes, she will be in my power. Don't look alarmed. You will have to render some assistance."

"I!"

"You."

"Not I ; I swear——"

"Silence! make no remark, but listen. She has now set out with her daughter, and is walking by the riverside. All you have to do in the matter, is to go to the girl—Emily I believe she is called—and say that her father has sent for her ; make some excuse, and that I leave to your fertile invention, for getting her away from the others—

from her mother. I will see to the rest with my men, who are waiting even now with the boat."

Rook shook from head to foot on hearing this.

But he was silent.

"Now go," said Morgan, sternly; "that way—quick, and remember what you have to do."

Rook stared upon the ground, but said never a word.

He paused irresolutely, for awhile, and then, without raising his eyes, he walked off sharply in the direction indicated by Morgan.

"What shall I do first?" he said, to himself; "go to Mr. Harkaway or to Mr. Harvey, or shall I first warn them? While I am gone to Mr. Harkaway, the mischief may be done; no, I had far better seek them and——"

As he thus soliloquised, he came suddenly in sight of two ladies, strolling along the waterside.

A thrill of terror shot through him as he recognised the people of whom Captain Morgan had spoken.

Mrs. Harvey and her daughter, little Emily.

He did not wait an instant, but flew to them, and bade them get back to the camp with all haste.

His manner appeared wild, and his voice incoherent; and at first they could scarce make out what he meant.

"Be off," he exclaimed, in an excited undertone. "Run—fly for your lives. A moment more and it will be too late."

"The poor man is mad," said Mrs. Harvey to herself.

Rook saw, by her half timid look and shrinking manner, what was passing in her mind.

"I am as sane as you are," he cried; "fly for your lives, I say. Morgan the bushranger and his men are hovering about."

"Morgan!" ejaculated Hilda, in terror.

"Yes."

"Come, then, Emily—quick, dear," said Mrs. Harvey; "fly back to the house as fast as your legs will carry you."

Emily ran off like the wind.

But her mother, who was less nimble, had not got three yards before Morgan and his men pounced upon her.

"Not so fast, my pretty one."

"Help! help!" she shrieked.

"Come, come, my lovely one," said Morgan, "don't fear me. I mean no harm."

"Help! help!"

Morgan now began to fear that her cries would be heard.

So he lifted the struggling Hilda in his arms, and hurried her away, in spite of all her wild efforts to disengage herself.

Meanwhile Rook had made desperate attempts to raise the alarm in the camp.

He ran on a little way, and blew loudly upon an alarm-whistle.

Still no one appeared to respond.

Hilda's shrieks for help were now piteous.

So the ex-convict, Rook, casting off all considerations for himself, rushed to intercept the bushrangers.

Morgan was making good progress with his struggling victim, while his men were following close behind, to oppose anybody.

Rook dashed after them.

"Stop, villain!"

Then he seized Morgan by the collar and swung him round, and Hilda was free.

But, before she had got three steps, Morgan clutched her again.

At that same moment he whipped out a pistol, and presented it at Rook.

"Traitor!" he cried, "take your death."

Click! a flash in the pan.

"Confusion!" angrily cried the bushranger chief.

"Help! help!" exclaimed Rook, wildly; for he now saw the hopelessness of attempting to cope with such odds.

Still he thought to detain them until assistance should come to him.

"Help! help! Harkaway, to the rescue!"

He rushed again at Morgan, but the latter met him with a blow from the butt end of his pistol, so well directed that it stretched Rook upon the ground.

At this instant shots were heard in rapid succession, at no great distance from the spot.

Rook heard them ere his senses forsook him—before he received that terrible blow—and he despaired.

He guessed that an attack, real or feigned, had been made upon the other end of the settlement, in order to

distract the attention from the scene of this present outrage.

And with this dreadful, despairing thought upon his mind, all became a blank.

He fainted from the pain of his wound.

CHAPTER XXII.

**MOLE MEETS HIGHWAYMEN AND IS ROBBED—THE BAGS OF GOLD
—WHAT FOLLOWED—THE USES OF GUNPOWDER TEA—TIT FOR
TAT.**

PERHAPS an explanation of the shots which the unfortunate convict heard would interest the reader.

For this, we must turn to our old friend, Isaac Mole.

Mr. Mole, whose old weakness had completely got the better of him of late, had only just taken the pledge, previous to going on a journey to a neighbouring settlement.

The object of this journey was to make a heavy purchase of specie for private speculation.

He had been greatly struck by the tales he had heard of the marvellous finds of speculative diggers; and armed with a well-lined purse he went off, mounted upon a stout cob, for he was becoming quite a skilful horseman.

He succeeded wonderfully—beyond his hopes.

Returning, he was so filled with satisfaction at his trading, that he was induced, in spite of his pledge-taking not being two days old, to accept a glass of grog from one of the diggers with whom he had traded.

Facilis descensus Averni.

One drop led to another.

The result may be seen easily enough by the intelligent reader.

Poor Mole got——

Hush!

He jogged along upon his cob, his gold jingling in his pockets, as oblivious of anything wrong as you could wish, and singing blithely to himself, when suddenly,

from behind a clump of trees, two men started out and confronted him.

"Hullo!"

"Hullo!"

The exclamation was mutual.

"Whither so fast, Mr. Mole?" said one of the newcomers.

"Mr. Mole!" quoth the worthy Isaac; "then you know me?"

"Of course."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Mole, in a tipsy voice; "wonderful."

"Who doesn't know the great Mr. Mole?" ejaculated one of the strangers.

"Will you get down and take some thing to drink with us, Mr. Mole?" said the other man, politely.

Mr. Mole could not resist such an invitation.

Down he dropped onto his wooden legs without another word.

The man who had invited him poured out some spirits from a pocket-pistol into a horn cup, and handed it to Mr. Mole.

"Your goodsh—I mean good healsh—health," stuttered the old gentleman.

"And yours," said the others, feigning to drink.

When Mr. Mole had drained his cup, according to custom, for he always drank a cup, one of the men, without another word of warning, popped out a pistol, and made this unceremonious request—

"Just let us have a look at your nuggets, if you please, Mr. Mole."

Mr. Mole said nothing.

The perspiration trickled down Mole's back, but he simply took out his bag, and dropped it into the other's hand.

"That's not all you have got," said the man, sharply, placing his pistol close to Mole's head.

"What, more?"

"One more. Hand it over."

"Here it is," said Mole, with a sigh; looking rather timidly at the pistol the man still held.

After all, he thought he had better get home with a

whole skin, and minus his bags of gold, than with his riches, and riddled with bullets.

So reasoned Mole.

And he was right.

"A nice little haul," said the man who had taken two bags.

"Very," said the other.

"What!" exclaimed Mole, wildly; "what, do you mean to take all from me?"

The two men burst out laughing at this.

"You get home now, Mr. Mole," said one, "as fast as you can, or you may find a bullet in some part of your body."

"Yes, get home, and thank your lucky stars that we don't want the cob as well," said the other.

"Give me my bags," cried poor Mole.

"Bah!" said one of the gentlemen, "get along home."

"You're not going to rob me thus."

"No, no—we have done it—we are not going to do it."

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Mr. Mole, "what will my wife say?"

"Probably say you are an old coward," said one of these amiable robbers.

"Or perhaps she'll only unscrew one of your wooden legs and whack you with it," suggested the other.

"Oh!" cried Mole.

"Good-night."

And they started off.

"Stop, stop!" cried Mole, "don't go."

They pulled up short.

"Have you got any more?"

"No, no; but do come back."

"What on earth are you bothering about?"

"Just have a little pity," implored Mole; "think what I shall have to suffer when I get back."

They laughed at this.

"Why, you discontented old fool," said one of these amiable gentlemen, "just compare yourself with that old man we stripped of his purse, or money-bag, for it was a money-bag——"

"And well filled," suggested his companion.

"Capitally—what would he say to find we had let you off so easily—eh? That's what I want to know."

"Can't say, I'm sure," replied Mole, "only I know that you'll make it precious warm work for my wife with me."

"Ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh," said Mole imploringly, "don't laugh. Do you really mean to take my money-bags?"

"Of course we do."

"Well, then, in common gratitude, help me out of this trouble."

"How?" demanded one of the robbers, much amused at the suggestion.

"Put a bullet through my coat-tails," said poor Mole.

"Oh, if that's all, willingly," was the reply.

Mole held out the tail of his coat, and the robber blazed away.

Bang! went a bullet through it.

"Now another, if you please," said Mole.

He held out the other side, and the other knight of the road let fly at it.

"Thank you. Now another."

This was granted by the robber.

"Now another, if you please, this side of my coat tail."

A fourth report, and a fourth hole in his coat was the result.

"One more, if you will kindly oblige me."

"I haven't got any more," said one of these amiable robbers, examining his powder-flask.

"But you have," said Mole to the second robber.

"No, not a shot."

He looked at his ammunition before he replied.

"Are you sure, sir?" asked Mole.

"Sure? Yes," said the man, laughing at Mole.

"And you?"

"No; I said so already."

"Very good," said Mr. Mole. "Then, my very good young men, I have."

And Mole produced a pair of pistols.

He quietly presented one at each of them.

"Now," said he, his tipsy demeanour vanishing at once, "just give up those bags."

"Never!" cried the two robbers, looking at each other, surprised at Mole's artful trick.

"Then I shall put a bullet—not in your coat, but in your head," said Mole.

"What? would you kill us?" cried the men, looking as though they would run.

"Stop, or I fire!"

Mr. Mole's demeanour had some thing unpleasant about it now, and when he made a sort of jerky movement forward, down dropped a bag from the hand of one of the robbers.

"Now the other, if you please."

"Come, now, I say——"

"The other," said Mole, sternly.

"There!"

Down it went.

"Thank you. Now the rest."

"That's all."

"Come, I say," quoth Mr. Mole in awe-inspiring accents, "don't try on any foolery with me, for I have promised to take home some plunder, and I know what you have got, so down with it."

The two knaves looked at each other for counsel. They had not a word and scarcely a look for themselves.

"You must be quick, or one of these pistols may go off," cried Mole, holding them in a line with the robbers' heads.

One grumblingly forked out a canvas bag of gold.

"Go on, my dear boys," said Mr. Mole.

"I've got no more."

"And you?"

"Not a skurrick," said the other, whatever a skurrick might be.

"Then off with you," said Mole, "or I'll blow you into smithereens."

His look alarmed them.

"Now if you are not off by the time I count ten, I fire."

Off they ran.

And when they were fairly out of sight, Mole picked up the bags and fastened them about him.

"Ha, ha! that's a stroke of business," said he to himself. "But they wouldn't have parted with their treasure like that if they had only known that my pistols were loaded by Mrs. Mole with gunpowder—tea."

And chuckling thus, he rode home on his cob.

When he came to count his gains, he found himself not less than three hundred pounds in pocket over the transaction.

"This is a real slice," said he.

And forthwith he set himself to invent a plausible yarn by which he should appear even more heroic than he had yet shown himself.

"Oh, oh!" laughed Mole, looking at his coat-tails, "I shall turn this to some account. Ha! my courage is great."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PURSUIT OF HILDA—TINKER'S PROGRAMME—HOW HE THREW A LIGHT ON THE JOB.

THE alarm of Hilda's abduction soon spread in the settlement.

Harvey, as you may suppose, was in an awful state of mind.

A party of armed men was organised in the space of a few minutes, and dispatched under different commanders in pursuit.

Their object was to spread out, and cover thus the longest line of country possible, and then at a certain distance, begin to advance at each extremity of the line so as to form a circle.

In this way the advance was made with great rapidity, when, as Harkaway was about to start, Tinker came bounding up to him.

"Massa Harkaway, Massa Harkaway," he cried panting.

"Well?"

"Suffin' to tell yar, Massa Harkaway," he panted.

"Go on then!" exclaimed Harkaway, impatiently; "for I have no time to lose."

"Mrs. Harvey——"

"Yes, yes; we all know that—carried off by Morgan's people, no doubt."

"An' Rook."

"What?"

"Rook, sar; dat 'fernal cantankerous bad Rook. Nasty fellar, Rook, sar."

Harkaway grew very uncomfortable at this.

"Why, what do you know against Rook, Tinker?"

"Rook am Cap'en Morgan's man, sar," replied the boy, with a significant leer. "Cap'en Morgan gib him ounces ob de yaller gold for to do all sort bad work; immense bery awful bad fellow, sar."

Tinker's extravagant adjectives worried old Jack in his present state of mind.

"Just say what you mean, Tinker, and don't beat about the bush, or I'll flay you alive."

"I see Rook waitin', sar, waitin' for dat Cap'en Morgan, an' dey do a big talk all about Mrs. Harvey."

Harkaway bounded forward at this, and caught Tinker by the throat.

"Don't you attempt to play any tricks with me, don't tell any lies, or you'll wish you'd never been born."

"I'se tellin' ob de troof, ebery word, sar, s'elp me golly, dere, sar. I know, sar, I watch Rook, 'case I see Cap'en Morgan an' de oders come up, an' so I run away and pretend to be awful feared, an' den I come back and I see——"

"What?"

"Lor', Massa Harkaway, how you do jump down poor Tinker's froat—an' den I see Cap'en Morgan talking wid Rook."

"Hah!"

"Yes, sar."

"What about?"

"All 'bout taking Mrs. Harvey away."

"The villain!" groaned Harkaway, "after all I've done for him, the scoundrel."

"Yes, sar."

"What did they say?"

"He want Rook to help him, and Rook 'won't an' den dey say all sorts naughty words together, and dey fight."

"Fight!"

"Yes, sar."

"Tinker," said Harkaway, looking him very straight in the face, "you're telling me lies."

"No, sar," protested the boy, earnestly; "dey fight

awful, until Cap'en Morgan smack him head wid der pistol, and Rook lay down and go to sleep.!

"Go to sleep," returned old Jack. "Oh, I see he fainted."

"Yes, sar; dat's it."

Harkaway felt this a relief to his mind.

It was painful beyond measure to think Rook could have behaved like a traitor.

"Well, well, Tinker," he said, "having got over that, the next thing is to see about getting Mrs. Harvey back as fast as we can."

"Yes, sar," exclaimed Tinker, with sudden vivacity.

Then he lapsed into sudden silence for awhile, from which he presently awoke, and with a grin he said to Harkaway, in a tone indicative of wonderful self-confidence—

"Tinker do dat."

"Do what?"

"Get back Missie Harvey awful double quick."

"You!" exclaimed Harkaway, with a smile.

"Yes, sar."

"How?"

"Massa Harkaway doesn't recollect dat Tinker was wid Cap'en Morgan," he said, slyly.

"Hah!" ejaculated Harkaway, catching at once at this notion, "I do recollect, Tinker; and if you are a good boy and true to us, you shall earn a better and a greater reward than any thing you can dream of."

Tinker looked earnestly at his master at this.

"Don't want nuffin', Massa Harkaway, for dat; Missie Harvey awful partikler fond of Tinker; Tinker awful partikler fond of Missie Harvey. Massa Harvey quite jealous of Tinker—yah, yah!"

Old Jack could not repress a smile himself.

"No matter for that. I'll undertake to say that Mr. Harvey will get over his jealousy, if you are the means of restoring his wife to him."

"Yes, sar."

"Now, tell me quickly, for the time is getting on, and I am growing impatient to be doing some thing more than gossip here; tell me how you propose to go to work."

Tinker began his reply by scratching his wool.

"Tinker'll go back fust, and den he'll see, and have a

talkee-talkee, and watch, and whistle you all when to come up! Bring all de niggers and all de gallopshus make-fires; and hab a cantankerous immense big blaze away at Cap'en Morgan."

"Very good, Tinker," said Harkaway; "I think I can trust you now."

"Yes, sar."

"Then let this be the signal between us; but first let me recommend the greatest caution, my good Tinker."

Tinker winked.

"Yes, sar, Tinker am sich an artful cuss—yah, yah!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

HILDA AND THE BUSHRANGERS—FAMILIAR FACES—AN ALARM—
TINKER THE SPY—MORE NEWS.

HILDA struggled vainly in the arms of her captor.

The strength of the notorious bushranger was some thing prodigious.

In spite of all her wildest efforts, she was borne away.

After a certain time, her strength began to fail her.

Her fright was piteous to behold.

A deathly faintness stole over her, and her senses were fast deserting her.

The sickly pallor of her cheek evidently alarmed the daring Morgan.

"Come, come, sweet one," said he; "let this revive you."

And he pressed his lips to her cheek.

Hilda was aroused at this indignity, and she fought her captor furiously.

Seizing him by the hair, she tore so viciously at him, that in sheer self-defence he let her fall.

As soon as she was upon her feet, she fled.

But her success was short-lived, for in the space of a minute or two, the bushranger was upon her again.

"If you get so rumbustical, my love," said he, pressing her to him in spite of herself, "we must find some means of holding you down; don't scratch, or I shall have to clip your claws."

* * * * *

They reached their destination after a weary journey, for Hilda would not walk.

Such a burden to carry is all very well for awhile, but even the most muscular man must necessarily tire under the load that he had to bear.

Upon their arrival at the bushranger's camp, they were met by two men, amongst others, whose appearance struck additional terror to her soul.

One was Hunston, who had ever been associated with the troubles of herself and her friends.

Toro, the Italian brigand and bully, was the other.

"Hallo!" cried Hunston, "why, you have bagged a prize, Captain Morgan."

"Don't you see who the prize is?" exclaimed Toro.

"A lady?"

"Aye; but who?"

Hunston stared again.

"Is it possible? Can I believe the evidence of my own eyes? Mrs. Harvey?"

Hilda roused at this, and drawing herself up before Hunston she exclaimed, in a voice of passionate energy—

"If you have a spark of manhood left, Mr. Hunston, you will protect me from these ruffians."

"Gently, gently, fair one," said Captain Morgan; "no names."

"No one means you any harm, Mrs. Harvey," said Hunston, "and as you are Captain Morgan's guest——"

"Prisoner."

"If he likes to place you under my care, I am sure we shall get on well together."

There was nothing much in the words, but the look that accompanied them made her shiver.

He drew near with an ominous gesture, when Morgan stepped before him.

"Stand back!"

"Why, really, Captain Morgan, I am an old acquaintance."

"Enough," said Morgan, sharply; "there is nothing like an understanding. Remember that I allow no familiarities with my guests. This lady must be treated with as much respect as myself. Let the least complaint come from her about you, or about anyone of you, woe

betide him. He will have to render me strict account. Do you hear?"

"You are too——"

"Silence!" shouted the bushranger.

Hunston was about to make some hasty rejoinder, when the expression of the bushranger captain caused him to be prudent.

Morgan was an unpleasant enemy to make, and Hunston felt an instinctive dread of him.

Disagreeable forebodings were ever in his mind in the presence of the redoubtable bushranger.

Were these forebodings really justified?

Time will show.

Meanwhile, Hunston with difficulty swallowed his wrath, and walked away moodily.

"Come what may," he muttered to himself, "I shall make a point of squaring accounts with our bully friend Morgan. Hang his impudence."

* * * * *

"Place the guard for the night," said Morgan.

One of his most reliable men proceeded to this task, when suddenly a black object tumbled into the open out from a cluster of thickly-grown shrubs and bushes.

"Hallo!"

"Shoot him down!"

"The blacks are upon us!" cried Captain Morgan. "Up with every mother's son of you. Look to your rifles."

"Yah, yah!" said a familiar voice, "don't be so catapwampously immense big frightened, Cap'en Morgan. Taint de debil, only poor nigger cove, boy Tinker."

"Tinker!"

"Yah, yah."

"What brings you here?"

"Got away from Massa Harkaway, sar," replied Tinker, "and I'se come to gib you warning."

"Of what?"

"Dey's coming."

"What, here?"

"Dey no find out yet, but dey got a big lot of men from eberywhere; all got horses and make fires. We get off, sar, sharp, sar, or de debils come up and make sassingers of dis fair infant. Yah, yah!"

Hilda heard.

She recognised Tinker at once, and at first she had gained new hope.

But now, on hearing, as she thought, that he was in league with the bushrangers, despair seized her.

"Deceitful wretch!" she cried, passionately, at the black boy. "After all the kindness we have shown you."

"Yah, yah!" grinned Tinker; "you no lub me."

Hilda was violent, and in her indignation she quite forgot the terrors of her present situation.

"If I ever get back, you shall have a sound whipping for this, you little fiend!" she exclaimed.

"Yah, yah!"

And "Yah, yah!" being all she could get out of him, she said no more, but bit her lips in sheer mortification.

Meanwhile, the bushrangers redoubled their vigilance round their camp.

Not a precaution was neglected.

Sentries were posted in all directions.

And now it was that Captain Morgan showed how admirably fitted he was for the post of commander.

He was everywhere at once, and displayed the greatest energy and activity without making any particular fuss about it.

"Stay you there, Tinker," he said, turning round, before quitting the sight of his prisoner.

"Yes, Captain Morgan. Tinker keep dam partik'lar watch over lubby gal, sar; yah, yah!"

"That's right."

And the captain of the bushrangers, perfectly at ease in his mind upon that score, turned round and resumed his duties. Now when Morgan was fairly out of sight, Tinker's demeanour changed with strange suddenness.

He dropped his aggravating laugh, and turned serious at once.

He shot a glance of meaning at Mrs. Harvey, and then he marched off to the clump of trees which sheltered the open spot at no great distance.

He dodged in and out of these forest monarchs to ascertain that there were no interlopers on the watch, and then back he ran.

But just as he was returning, a tall, dark figure made

a sudden appearance upon the scene, and stepped up to Hilda

"My fair Hilda," said Toro, for it was the Italian, "you're looking now lovelier than ever."

Hilda curled her lip haughtily, but was silent.

"Come, Mrs. Harvey, beauteous signora, one chaste salute—nay, don't refuse me. I have loved you from the first."

He would have seized her in his arms, but Hilda was not to be thus rudely approached with impunity.

She dragged herself away, and called loudly for help.

In an instant Tinker came bounding up to the spot.

"Be off, you imp of Satan!" thundered Toro; "be off, or I'll slay you."

"No, no," said Tinker, grinning, "you no kill Tinker, but Tinker kill you gollopshus immense big quick if you ain't gone."

Toro, with a fierce oath, strode after the black boy.

Now Tinker showed extreme artfulness, for he appeared to dodge him, and yet he allowed himself to be caught.

"Now you shall have it!" muttered Toro, between his teeth.

Holding the black boy with one hand, he made a sharp slap at him with the other.

Down bobbed Tinker.

"Yah, yah!"

"Curse your yah, yah!" cried the Italian, furiously seizing him again. "Take that!"

Tinker was out of his arms again in a jiffy.

A precious awkward thing to hold was Tinker, for beyond one very small garment, he had no clothes on whatever.

His skin was smooth and shining, and altogether he was as difficult to hold as an eel.

Toro was about to fly after the boy again, when suddenly he felt a sharp, stinging sensation on his right leg, just above the knee, and looking down, found that it was bleeding.

"Why, what on earth——"

He paused in utter amazement.

"Want any more like dat, bully man?" asked Tinker.

"Why, you have stabbed me!"

"Yes, bully man," grinned the boy, "only a lilly bit ;

gib you immense cantankerous lot more next time. Don't be greedy, yah, yah !”

And then he took from his loin cloth a stumpy knife, with which he had contrived to wound the Italian.

But the latter had not felt the wound in the excitement of catching the eel-like black boy.

“I'll kill you for this,” said Toro, fiercely.

“Oh, no,” returned the Tinker, with irritating cheerfulness, “you no catchey Tinker. Massa Morgan beat you, and you awful big afraid ob Massa Morgan ; yah, yah !”

Toro bandaged his leg round with his neckcloth, and then made after the boy.

But he might as well have tried to catch a rainbow, or an electric shock.

Tinker was, as vulgar folks say, all over the shop at once.

He was a master in the art of aggravating, too, and he had an endless lot of tricks calculated to goad a man like Toro to desperation.

He would wait until he got close up to him, and then, after some insulting gesture, he would pelt him with a handful of mud or stones, and bound away like a rocket.

In the course of this singular chase, Tinker ran round towards the spot where Hilda stood, and here he pulled up short, holding his hands behind him while he waited for Toro to approach.

The Italian came on.

But he did not observe that Tinker had handed Mrs. Harvey a piece of paper.

She opened it eagerly, and found, hurriedly written upon it, these words—

“Keep up your courage ; we are near, and shall soon set you free. The bearer of this is a friend, in whom you may implicitly rely.

“JACK H.”

The words danced before her eyes.

For a moment she quite forgot her presence of mind, and she spoke her thoughts aloud.

“How I wronged that brave boy ! Poor Tinker ! They are here, perhaps—perhaps even now about to rush in and drive these wretches and ruffians away.”

Toro advanced, and Tinker dodged away as usual.

But Toro caught sight of the open paper in Hilda's hand, and in an instant his suspicions were aroused.

Without one word or sign of warning, he made a stride forward and snatched the paper from her hand.

"What is this? Hah! treason!" he cried. "By the fiends, the boy shall die!"

The words were barely uttered, when Tinker sprang upon him with the agility of a monkey, and snatched the paper away.

His stumpy knife played its part again, for Toro received a hideous gash in the cheek that laid bare the bone.

Toro gave a yell of mingled agony and rage.

"You Satan's egg!" he yelled, holding his cheek, while the blood poured through his fingers, "you shall die by slow torture for this."

"Big bully man; yah, yah!" was Tinker's only reply.

And he threw in another sight, placing his fingers to his nose, and wound up by pelting the wounded Toro with pebbles.

Just at this moment Captain Morgan came up with two of his followers.

"Hullo!" he cried; "why, what is all this outcry? I thought the Philistines were down upon us."

"Seize that boy!" cried the Italian.

They laid hands upon Tinker, who stood very pluckily in custody.

"I found him conniving with the prisoner; he gave her a letter."

"Oh," exclaimed the virtuous Tinker, "what a naughty, great big lie."

"A letter!" cried Captain Morgan.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"He has it now."

They searched the black boy.

He had not many corners to conceal anything, you see, and they found nothing at all upon him.

"There are no signs of a letter," said Morgan, sternly.

"Then he has swallowed it," persisted Toro.

He was right. Tinker had.

At the first sign of danger, he scrambled it into his mouth and bolted it as easily as if it had been a Cockle's antibilious.

The ingenious black boy, however, threw up his hands, showed the whites of his eyes, and appeared otherwise greatly scandalised.

"Oh, my, what a great whacker, Cap'en Morgan, sar," he said, in virtuous indignation. "Dis naughty, ugly fellar wanted to kiss your gal—de imperant beast!—an' I ses—'Cap'en Morgan left Tinker on guard, so no you don't,'—and ses he—'Yes I do,' and he went for me; but I gib him one in de leg and anoder in de cheek, and he no like my nicey-niceys, and he couldn't catch me, and den, in a beast of a great, big, immense temper, he ses—'I'll told Cap'en Morgan dat you brought a letter, and den Cap'en Morgan'll gib you suffin' for yourself.'"

This sounded like the truth.

Morgan glanced from the boy to Toro and then to Mrs. Harvey.

Approaching the latter, he raised his hat politely.

"I hope, madam, that you have been put to no annoyance by my people," he said.

"But for that boy I should have been subjected to the grossest insults from that ruffian, your worthy comrade."

Morgan changed colour.

"Has he dared——"

"The boy spoke the truth when he told you that he had defended me."

Morgan nodded his head in a determined manner.

"Good; we can't allow this sort of thing to continue. An example must be made; seize Toro."

Several of the bushrangers obeyed his order.

"Tie him up."

"Not before me," cried Mrs. Harvey, eagerly, "not before me, I implore."

"Your wishes are law to me," returned the bushranger chief; "remove him."

The Italian was hustled away from the spot.

"Now, Tinker."

"Yes, sar."

"Get some nice pliable switches, willows if you can."

"Yes, sar," said Tinker, in eager anticipation.

"And flog away until you are tired out."

"Tinker no get tired eber ; him work hard, yah, yah ; whack ! whack ! on de big Toro's back."

And grinning all over his face, the black boy turned off to the flogging.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH A DISGRACEFUL CONSPIRACY IS HATCHED AGAINST
ISAAC MOLE.

THE greatest excitement prevailed in Harkawayville, as they had christened their new settlement.

Anxious moments these were indeed for all who were left behind.

Amongst these were of course the ladies, with the unfortunate exception of the one whose loss caused the present trouble.

The two boys, young Jack and his comrade Harry Girdwood, were left on guard.

Mr. Mole, too.

The unfortunate ex-convict Rook was found to be in a most precarious condition, and he was tended with the greatest care by the ladies.

* * * * *

"Do you know, my dear Jack," said Mr. Mole, "I can scarcely restrain my impatience when I think——"

"Of what, sir?"

"Of your dear, brave father and poor Dick being in peril there, while we are on guard here. I long for——"

"For what?"

"Glory, Jack, glory ; to share the dangers. I was never born for a quiet life ; my love was danger always."

"Ahem !"

"You appear doubtful."

"Not I, sir."

"Well, I must tell you that I have grown rusty since my last little skirmish on my way from the gold fields yonder. Gold ; what a magic ring ! What music ! What fascination in the sound, but still the word danger I love better."

"Yes," said Jack, smiling inwardly at the old gentleman's enthusiasm.

"This is a wonderful country. I shouldn't wonder if there was gold upon the very earth we tread."

"Mr. Mole, Mr. Mole," cried a clear, ringing voice, with a pleasing foreign accent; "you are growing greedy, I fear."

"Not I, Paquita, my dear," said the old gentleman; "only it is really a tempting subject to excite even the most stoical of our kind."

"Harry," said Paquita.

"Yes."

"We want you and Jack."

The two boys followed Paquita into the house.

They found little Emily awaiting them.

The poor child was in the greatest distress, and, indeed, had never got over the shock which the outrage on her mother had occasioned her.

She was constantly in tears, and knew not a moment's rest in mind or in body.

Young Jack, her gallant champion, was the only person who could cheer her at all.

Paquita knew this well.

"Here, Jack," said little Emily, forcing an appearance of cheerfulness which she was far from feeling; "here are the English papers. Now come, all of us, and have a good read."

"Let Harry read out to us," said young Jack; "he's the best reader."

This was settled, and Harry Girdwood selected some interesting pieces until he came upon one which excited general attention, and led to some very singular results.

"Salting a mine."

"Whatever can that mean, Harry?" - said little Emily.

"Wait a bit; this would interest old Mole finely."

He read it down, and found that it was a law case exciting great attention in London, which treated of a gigantic swindle in getting up a company for the purchase of a diamond mine.

Diamonds had been purchased at a great cost, and the ground which they proposed purchasing was "salted"—*i.e.*, sprinkled with real diamonds just before it was visited by the committee of inspection.

"This is glorious!" exclaimed young Jack, laughing

all over his face. "How I should like to salt a mine for old Mole."

"Not easily done—we want the materials," said Harry.

"The diamonds?"

"Yes."

"But I mean a gold mine."

"I see—but how?"

"Why, we could get a little real gold if necessary, but I don't see that it is; that's near enough," he added, pointing to an old-fashioned brass candlestick.

"That?"

"Yes."

"Now, now, it's all very well, but old Mole is not to be gulled without a little trouble."

"Perhaps not, but you have heard of candlestick gold?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I know that this old fellow melted down would make lovely gold, and you shall see it too."

Poor Mole.

Fun and danger loomed in the distance once more.

And yet, at this very moment, he was calmly sleeping hard by, dozing after a whisky toddy of such a strength as would make you or I wink again.

But the details of the infamous conspiracy against the worthy Isaac's peace of mind must be related in another chapter.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW IT WAS PREPARED FOR MR. MOLE—WHAT WICKEDNESS!—
THE GREED OF GOLD—THE TRANSFER—MOLE A MINE OWNER—
WHAT NUGGETS!—WHAT GOLD!—WHAT WEALTH!

"FIRST take our candlestick," said young Jack, "and melt it carefully down into little bits, then pick out the mine, then remove a few inches of the earth from the surface and mix the nuggets sparsely, mind, so as not to excite any suspicions."

"Then," added Harry Girdwood, solemnly, "we let Mr. Mole have an accidental view, and see what can be done."

"Agreed."

They shook hands over this iniquitous compact, the young miscreants, and completed their proceedings.

* * * * *

Some few days after this, strange rumours got to be buzzed about the settlement.

The two darkeys, Sunday and Monday, it was whispered, had lighted upon gold.

You can imagine the effect of these reports.

The two dusky diggers roped-in their ground and allowed none of the curious to approach too closely.

Mr. Mole heard these rumours in due course, as Harry and young Jack took care he should, and down he hobbled to see for himself.

Now began the extreme artfulness.

The conspirators had well matured their plans.

They hung back, pretending to take no particular notice of the matter, and awaited Mr. Mole.

He came.

They knew that he was sure to tackle them, and he did.

"Do you really think, dear boys, that these two niggers have hit upon a mine?" he said.

"Of course they have," said young Jack, "not much doubt about that, eh, Harry?"

"But of course, Mr. Mole, it belongs to them," said Harry.

"And what—what can be the value of their find?" asked Mr. Mole, eagerly.

"Can't say."

"But you have seen a good deal more of it than I have," said Mr. Mole, eagerly; "what should you say?"

"A few thousands at the outside," suggested Harry Girdwood, "only a few."

"Yes," said young Jack, "these mines are so deceptive, you never know what's what."

"Precisely."

"Sometimes a good thing turns out a regular duffer."

"A what?"

"Duffer."

"I object to such an expression," said Mr. Mole who was upon his dignity, "even when a gold mine is in question. Slang, my dear boys, is objectionable in man, woman, or child."

"Quite so," said Harry.

"But what is your real opinion about——"

"The mine?"

"Yes."

"It is a fine thing," said young Jack, "but I don't want Sunday or Monday to get too great an idea of it, or they might run the price up of their treasure."

"I see," said Mr. Mole, winking and looking most artful, "they want to sell?"

"Not want to," replied young Jack; "they would, perhaps, and I should like dad to buy as cheap as possible."

Mr. Mole walked away.

These words made a deep impression on his mind, and he came speedily to the inevitable conclusion that he would like to be the purchaser.

The conspirators had, of course, calculated upon this.

So he sought Sunday on the quiet, and sounded him.

"I can't say as I want to sell it, brudder Mole," said Sunday, "an' if I did, I don't s'pose that I could find anyone to give my price."

Mr. Mole fidgeted.

"What do you call your price?" he asked, vainly trying to conceal his eagerness.

"Oh, a whole lot of money," said Sunday.

"What do you mean by that? Ten pounds?" asked Mr. Mole, by way of a feeler.

"More likely fifty," returned Sunday.

Mole chuckled.

If the find was worth anything at all, fifty pounds was a ridiculously small price to put upon it.

What could be better?

"Perhaps I might buy it," said he, in an off-hand way, "if we could come to terms. I should like to see it very much."

"Well," said Sunday, "as you are my own brudder, in a manner of speaking, I don't know that I ought to refuse. But Monday don't let no one look at it; wait until there ain't no one about, and then you can come in."

"All right."

And Mr. Mole walked off to chuckle and rub his hands in silent satisfaction.

* * * * *

They were alone.

Mr. Mole stood within the magic circle, the roped-in space to which the two darkeys, Sunday and Monday, asserted their claim.

"So this is the spot!" said Mole. "Who would ever imagine that we were walking over the precious metal here? However did you find it out?"

"I was digging some sand out when I first got hold of a bit of yellow metal," replied Sunday, "a lump."

"A lump?" echoed Mr. Mole, in awe-stricken accents. "Large?"

"Very."

"Goodness me! I should so much like to see some of it," said Mr. Mole.

"Easy enough," returned Sunday, promptly.

So saying, he placed a shovel in the old gentleman's hands.

"Have a dig."

Mr. Mole said never a word, but drove the spade into the soft, yielding earth.

One shovelful was turned over, and as he let the sand and earth drop from it, half a dozen heavy nuggets fell to the ground.

Mole's eyes dilated as he plumped on and scrambled them up in his hands.

"Gold, gold, gold!" he muttered, vainly endeavouring to subdue his excitement; "what a feast, ye gods!"

"You ain't found much, brudder Mole?" said Sunday, who was complacently smoking his pipe.

"No, no, no!" returned Mole, "not much."

"Not so much as I turned up every go, brudder Mole."

Mole gave a subdued but ecstatic groan.

"How much do you want for me to take it off your hands?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Where's Monday?"

"Here I am, Mr. Mole," said the Prince of Limbi, stepping up, for he had been hanging about awaiting his cue.

"Sunday wants to buy out your right to this piece of land for fifty pounds."

"Does he?" said Monday; "well considerin' that it's

mine as well as his, he might ask me before he does anything."

"Just so."

"I hope they're not going to quarrel over it," thought Mole, anxiously; "there never was a more foolish invention than partnership."

"I know you would like for brudder Mole to have it, Monday," the darkey said, in a semi-apologetic tone to his partner in the diggings.

"Oh, of course. Mole is our friend."

"If that's agreed," said Mr. Mole, much relieved and eager to clinch the bargain, "here's the money."

"Good, friend Mole. You will make your fortune. You find lots of gold, if you dig long enough for it."

"Let's have it all in fair and business-like order. Give me a receipt, and state on it what it is all for," said Mole.

"Bery good, brudder Mole," said Sunday, leering at his black partner; "you draw up de paper dockymment, and we'll write our names to it."

"Agreed."

"That's capital," said Mr. Mole. "I'm delighted to find you such business-like people; and now, all we have to do," he added, producing a written paper from his pocket, "is to sign this."

Sunday took the paper, and scanned its contents.

Then he handed it to Monday.

"Why, Mr. Mole," said the latter, "you have got it already written out."

Mr. Mole appeared slightly confused at this.

"Yes, I have," he said, coughing a little; "I had some faint idea that you would perhaps be inclined to treat with me."

"Oh."

"Yes."

"How very odd."

A short silence ensued; and then Mr. Mole produced a pen and an inkhorn.

It looked as if every thing had been cut and dried in the old gentleman's mind.

"Well," he said, nervously, "we had better sign."

"Perhaps you'd like to try the ground a bit more before you settle it," suggested Monday.

"They're hanging fire," said Mr. Mole to himself.

"No, no," he added aloud, in as off-hand a manner as he could assume, "we are all friends together, and there's no deception."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Sunday, showing the whites of his eyes in his virtuous reproof even of the remark; "could I deceive my own brudder?"

"Oh, bother the brother," said Mr. Mole, impatiently, for he never relished the claim of kindred which Sunday was constantly asserting.

Sunday grinned.

"Sign away, all of us, den," he said.

And he opened the final negotiation by scrawling his own signature across the document.

Monday grinned.

"That's it," said Mr. Mole, folding up the paper and pocketing it; "now it's mine. I will to work, and find gold, gold, gold."

Sunday and Monday grinned as they walked away.

There was a ring in their laugh that the worthy old gentleman hardly liked.

No matter.

He held the treasure.

"What did the quaint niggers mean by that hoarse laugh?" he asked himself again and again; "no matter, those laugh best who laugh last."

Still he had just the faintest misgivings.

"Surely, they can't have played me any trick?" he said to himself, again and again. "Oh, no——"

He stooped and picked up a piece of the shining yellow metal.

"This is solid fact," he said, as he fondled it in his hand, "solid, solid fact, and there's no mistake about it."

He looked about him anxiously as he spoke.

Already his newly-acquired wealth was bringing its penalties.

Such is the price of riches.

"I shan't be able to leave it night or day," he said to himself. "As soon as it gets known how rich the prize is, it will excite the cupidity of every one in the settlement."

So he prepared to camp there for the night; but before night came he dug, and sifted, and sifted and dug until he had got several ounces of the precious metal, and

gathering them all together, he held his treasure in his open palms, groaning in ecstasy over it.

"Made for life," he kept muttering to himself, "for life, for life. Mole, Mole, you're a lucky old dog."

And so mumbling he dropped into a feverish sleep; but trouble was already looming in the distance.

Trouble which the old gentleman had never contemplated. Trouble in the shape of his old tormentors.

But before we can let the reader enjoy further Mr. Mole's perplexities we must return to Hilda.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN ALARM—THE BUSHRANGER'S RESOLVE—THE MARCH TO BATTLE
—BRAVE LITTLE TINKER LEFT ON GUARD—"AIN'T I WICKED
JEST?"—A FIGHT.

THE punishment of the Italian ruffian was interrupted by a sudden alarm.

Bigamini, who had fallen naturally into his old and congenial character of spy, came flying up to Captain Morgan with the most startling intelligence.

"There's a whole army upon the march, Capt'in Morgan," he said, in considerable excitement.

"An army of what?" demanded the bushranger chief, with coolness.

"Enemies," replied the spy; "all the settlement, I should say."

"In one party?"

"No; several."

"Who leads?"

"Harkaway is leading one of the parties."

"And the other?"

"Harvey one and that big Jefferson, the American, the other," was the reply.

Morgan frowned.

"They mean business, apparently," he said.

"Precious ugly business too, capt'in," said the cockney spy: "s'elp me Robert."

Morgan smiled.

"Ah, well, I dare say we shall be ready for them—they don't know Captain Morgan yet."

"Ah, Capt'in Morgan," said Bigamini, "if you would take a numble cove's advice, you'd let that lovely gal go."

"What!" thundered the bushranger chief, turning upon the spy as if he would annihilate him, "do you dare to offer your counsel?"

"I only——"

"Silence!"

"Beg parding."

"Silence."

"Yes, sir."

"Go!"

"Yes, sir."

And precious glad of the permission, the spy scrambled out of the fierce chief's presence.

Morgan walked up and down in thought for some little time.

"They must not get as far as this, at any rate," he muttered to himself; "no, no; I must meet them half-way and fight them. They shall have a taste of bush-fighting, and see how they like it.

"Yes, yes, Harkaway, in Captain Morgan you will find no Greek or Italian coward to fight with, but an Englishman bold as yourself."

Then turning sharply round, Morgan called the black boy.

"Yes, Cap'en Morgan," answered Tinker, bounding forward.

"There's going to be a fight, Tinker," said Morgan.

"Larks!" cried the black boy, capering about; "gallopshus larks. Tinker go and put on his war-paint."

"No, no; you'll have to stay on guard here."

"Where?" demanded the boy apparently crestfallen and disappointed.

"Here, to mind Mrs. Harvey. You shall have some of the fighting a little later on."

"Bery good, sar," returned Tinker, "I mind de gal, sar; nobody take away your gal away from Tinker, sar."

"Treat her with every respect."

"Yes, sar."

"And I'll reward you handsomely, for you are a fine boy."

"Tinker a lubly boy, sar," returned the young nigger, proudly; "splendiferous, magnificent critter; look at him noble self, sar."

"Well, I don't know so much about your looks," returned the brushranger chief, "but you are faithful to those you like, and those you serve."

Tinker's eyes twinkled strangely as he replied—

"Yes, sar, Tinker bery faithful, sar. So you find, sar. Awful splendid faithful critter, sar, to those he lubs."

"Well, now I'm off, that's enough for you. Look well after the lady."

"Yes, sar."

"And look to me for your reward," said Morgan.

"Yes, sar, Tinker do him duty, sar."

And with a final word of admonition, the leader of the lawless bushrangers started off to collect his men, and march on to meet the advancing army from Harkaway settlement.

* * * * *

"Oh, yes," said Tinker, "I'll mind de gal; Missie Harvey bery safe wid dis chile—yah, yah! Poor Cap'en Morgan—yah, yah, yah! Golly! ain't I thunderin' can-tank'rous wicked jest—yah, yah!"

And Tinker grinned, looking intensely satisfied at his own wickedness.

What shape his wickedness took will soon be explained to the reader.

Morgan was already on the march, and, indeed, had progressed some considerable distance, when a loud warning call behind them attracted attention.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the bushranger, "look round."

"There's someone coming," said one of the men.

A man, bounding along at a tremendous pace, now appeared in sight.

"Stop, stop!" he shouted out as he ran.

"Why, it's that idiot, Bigamini," said Captain Morgan.

He was right.

Bigamini bounded up to the party of bushrangers, out

of breath, and apparently in a state of intense excitement and alarm.

"What on earth ails you?" demanded Captain Morgan, as Bigamini came up.

"Such a blessid patter I've had of it," he gasped, "such a game of 'are an' 'ounds, blowed if I've got no wind left to speak of."

"What's the matter now?" demanded the bushranger chief. "Speak quickly."

"She's gone."

"Gone?"

"Bolted!"

"Who has gone?"

"The gal—Mrs. Harvey."

"But where's the boy, Tinker?" cried Morgan, clutching hold of Bigamini.

"Bolted, likewise," said the spy; "absquatulated, namassed, sloped."

Morgan was fairly staggered at this news.

"I'll not believe it!" he exclaimed; "you're deceiving me. Beware how you trifle with me."

He seized Bigamini fiercely by the throat.

"I say now, capt'in, drop it," remonstrated the luckless spy. "You can't get her back by stoppin' the hair in my wisen."

Morgan threw him heavily away, and he fell.

"Why didn't you intercept them?" he said.

"'Cos why?" answered Bigamini. "I was a-listening behind the trees, and I heerd the black kid talk about which way they was going as soon as you were fairly out of the way. Then says I to myself, if I stops 'em now, they'll diddle me afterwards; the best course is to consult the capt'in before he gets too far off——"

"And while you are here?"

"They've bolted."

"Fool!"

"Not quite a fool neither, Capt'in Morgan, 'cos I know exact the way as they have took, 'cos why?—I heerd 'em map out all their journey as nice as nine-pence."

"And you think you could overtake them?"

"Yes."

"Are you armed?"

"I've got my barkers," replied Bigamini, producing his pistols.

"Off with you then," said the bushranger, "overtake them, or never show up here again."

"Yes, capt'in."

"Shoot the boy."

"I will, with pleasure, capt'in."

"And bring back the lady. Respect her, or you will have to answer to me."

"Never fear, capt'in."

"Mind, bring her back, or don't show your face to me again."

"I'll bring her back, and give Tinker a shot through his impish head," said Bigamini, earnestly.

And off he ran.

"The capt'in ain't to say chi'ce in his lingo," said the spy. "In fact, he's so very insultin' at times as he gets my monkey reg'lar up. Talking of monkeys, I wonder whether that young monkey Tinker will show fight?"

It is rather odd that his soliloquy should so run upon the word monkey.

And why?

Read on, and you will see.

* * * * *

Yes.

It was true.

Tinker had run away with the prisoner he had been left to guard.

It was also true, unfortunately, that while they were concerting their plans, and mapping out the route back to the settlement, Bigamini the spy was lurking in ambush and listening to what was being said.

Now Tinker knew every inch of the ground, so to speak.

Trees, stones, and other signs, which to a stranger would have passed unnoticed, served him as landmarks in his progress.

Part of the country which they had to traverse was flat and unmarked by any special features.

But after an hour's hard walk, or, perhaps, we should more properly say run, for they kept upon the trot for the most part of the journey, the ground grew more uneven,

and assumed an appearance of hill and vale, that promised well for Hilda's desires.

And frequently they came in sight of trees.

This was regarded as a piece of good fortune by both of them.

They could rest here for awhile in safety.

And rest they did, for they were both fatigued with their exertions.

"I can scarcely put one foot before the other now, my good Tinker," said Mrs. Harvey.

"Awful great big sorry for dat, Missie Harvey," said the black boy, "'cos Tinker ain't big enough to carry you home."

Hilda smiled.

"No, Tinker, I should be too big a baby for you, I fear."

"You not a baby at all, Missie Harvey," said Tinker, proudly; "you bery bold lady, bery lubly lady, bery brave lady."

She smiled again.

"Not altogether a coward, yet not brave."

She concluded with a faint scream.

"What's that?"

"Which?"

"Look!"

She pointed to the branch of one of the nearest trees, where a fantastic-looking object squatted upon a branch, looking down upon them.

A huge monkey.

There he sat chewing some thing that he had found, and looking as wise as an owl.

Tinker made a step or two forward to inspect the strange object closer.

"Don't leave me, Tinker," exclaimed Mrs. Harvey; "stay close by me."

"All right, Missie Harvey; don't you know dat remarkable gollopshus individdle?"

"Know him; no."

"Why, it is Nero."

Nero—for it was our old friend—grinned, and slid down from his perch.

"Good Nero," said Hilda; "I am so glad it is a friend; shake hands."

Nero put out his paw.

He wagged his head in his well-known old-fashioned way, and grinned at them both, dividing his attentions and his favours fairly between them.

"How are all at home?" said Mrs. Harvey smilingly.

Nero caught a flea by way of answering this.

"Oh, Nero, Nero, why can't you talk? You could make me feel so happy, or perhaps not. Perhaps you would have bad news to tell me. Well, well you have none at all; 'no news is good news,' we have always heard. Nero!"

This last mention of the monkey's name was caused by his sudden rushing off.

Back he flew to his tree, and began tearing furiously at one of the smaller branches.

"Nero!"

"Come back, sar."

Nero took no heed of Mrs. Harvey nor of Tinker.

Evidently there was some thing wrong with him.

What could it be?

They had not long to wait to find out, for while their attention was thus absorbed by the wild antics of the monkey, a voice exclaimed—

"Got you at last, have I?"

Hilda turned with a half-stifled scream.

There, not ten feet from where she stood, was a man, presenting a pair of pistols at them.

One at herself.

The other at Tinker.

"Oh!"

"Now, marm," said this man, "back you go, or I'll shoot you, damme!"

"Ugly beast!" cried Tinker.

But he kept at a respectful distance from the threatening pistol.

The reader has, of course, divined who this was.

Bigamini.

Who could it be but the villanous spy?

When he boasted that—to quote his own peculiar idiom—he ran like a blooming deer, his brag was not altogether devoid of foundation.

He had precious soon caught them up, when we take into consideration the long start they had got of him.

"Come along, my dainty girl," said he to Hilda ; "off with you."

"Never," returned Hilda, proudly ; "I'll die first."

"Now, don't you aggrawate a poor devil," said Bigamini, "or blest if you mayn't die, and no error about it."

"Begone, and let us proceed on our way," said Hilda, loftily. "If you attempt to molest me further you will suffer ; I have a husband."

"I know Dick Harvey very well," returned Bigamini insolently ; "we're old pals, in fact."

"Then you know that Richard Harvey is not a man to be trifled with ; you are safe only at a distance."

"Oh, I'll keep a long way off him, with you ; so on you come."

"Begone !"

"You defy me?"

"I do."

"You beast, put down dat cantank'rous, nasty, dam make-fire," said Tinker to the spy.

"If you ain't off double quick, you black devil, I'll shoot you. I got orders for it."

"Yah, yah !" jeered Tinker, "you big drunk, can't aim straight—yah, yah !"

"Can't I?" retorted Bigamini ; "take that."

And he let fly.

Hilda gave a scream as Tinker dropped and rolled over and over upon the hard ground.

Bigamini ran up to finish him off, when strangely enough, Tinker, in his struggles, rolled between the spy's legs, and tripped him up.

And they both rolled upon the ground together.

In fact, they were in half a jiffey so thoroughly mixed up, that the difficulty was to distinguish which was which.

Tinker's oily skin offered no hold to his adversary.

After a momentary scramble, up Tinker got, and snatched up the pistol that was yet undischarged from the ground.

Bigamini saw how matters were, and ducking to avoid the fire, in case Tinker should be about to shoot, he leapt upon him.

Hilda now flew to Tinker's assistance.

But her aid was not needed, for help came from a most unexpected quarter.

Some thing whizzed through the air, and came down with a mighty thwack upon poor Bigamini's scone.

Down he dropped.

"Oh, oh!" he yelled. "I'm done for. Murder—oh!"

"His unexpected assailant was the monkey, Nero.

Tinker stepped back, pistol in hand, and left Bigamini and Nero to have it out together.

Nero's gentle nature vanished altogether, and dropping the branch of the tree which he had torn off for a cudgel, he fell on the spy.

They closed.

Now, no sooner did Bigamini see that big, hairy face close to his, and the fierce eyes gleaming into his own, than fear filled his craven soul, for he had quite forgotten the existence of the great monkey.

"Oh, the devil! I'm in the clutch of the Evil One at last," he groaned.

Still he fought.

Yet not with the vigour and fierce determination he would otherwise have shown.

Nero tore at him with the greatest ferocity, and buried his claws in the wretched man's flesh.

So desperate was the battle that Bigamini was speedily blinded with his own blood.

And all the time, Hilda and Tinker stood looking on.

Hilda horrified, fear-stricken, at the spectacle.

Tinker laughing.

Yes, the black boy enjoyed it mightily.

"Nero, Nero!" cried Mrs. Harvey.

But Nero's blood was up.

He paid no heed.

"Drag him away, Tinker," she implored; "he will kill that wretched man."

"Yah, yah!"

"Do you hear?"

"Yes, Missie Harvey, deblish fine dat, de ugly feller no kill me den. Yah, yah! gib it him, Nero. Go it, Nero! him dam bad man."

Nero wanted no encouraging to this end. Bigamini's struggles grew fainter.

He battled feebly, instinctively, while the monkey was as fresh and as vigorous as ever.

He fastened at length upon the wretched spy's throat, and there he held him to the bitter end.

Bigamini fought no longer now.

His head fell back.

His arms hung helplessly at his side.

His eyes were starting from their sockets. His tongue protruded.

A ghastly, sickly, spectacle.

Bigamini the murderer, convict, and spy, was dead !

"Come away, Tinker," exclaimed Hilda, in accents of mingled awe and horror ; "he has killed him."

"Yah, yah !" grinned Tinker. "Immense, big, splendid fellow, Nero. Me lub Nero ; him better man dan that wicked spy."

They turned away.

And happily they reached the settlement without any further molestation.

And now you understand why we remarked upon the singular chance of Bigamini using the word monkey repeatedly in his memorable soliloquy, after starting upon this pursuit, destined to prove fatal to him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANXIETIES—HOPES AND FEARS—A VISIT TO MR. MOLE'S MINE—
WARNINGS OF DANGER—FOREWARNED, FOREARMED.

WHEN Hilda and Tinker reached the settlement, they found that there were no tidings whatever of Harvey or of Harkaway—nor, indeed, of any of the party who had gone in pursuit of her.

This was a sad result, indeed, after her happy escape from peril.

"There is no fear, mamma," said little Emily, who, it need not be said, was overjoyed to see her mother again, "for they are so strong and so brave. Uncle Harkaway is with papa and Mr. Jefferson and numbers of our men, all armed, and brave as can be."

"I can't say that I fear," answered Hilda, "for, to-

gether, I don't believe that there are many that could oppose your father and brave Jack Harkaway. Harkaway!" she added; "why, there is music in the very name."

And so there was.

Traitors trembled at the sound, and true men grew enthusiastic in the praises of old Jack.

"Dad is safe enough," said young Jack, repeatedly.

This was not only to reassure his mother and their friends generally, but also to make himself easy in his mind, which he was very far from being at present.

Indeed, he had very serious doubts of it.

Anxiety was upon every face in the settlement.

At length they came to the resolve to send out a man in search of the absent friends.

One of their men volunteered for this service, and he was duly armed and furnished with provisions of the most portable character.

This done, they grew more easy in their minds.

"Another day," said Mrs. Harkaway, with a sigh of relief, "and we shall certainly have them with us again."

* * * * *

Another day passed.

Yet no tidings.

Two days more, and three men were started off in another direction.

A full code of signals was arranged with them, and every possible precaution was taken.

And this tended considerably to restore confidence in all their minds.

* * * * *

"Well," said Harry Girdwood, "I don't see the fun in making ourselves and everybody else wretched."

"Nor I."

"Nor dis chile!" said Tinker, with a precious long face; "I'se cantank'rous, dam miserable!"

"Let's go to the gold mine, and see how old Mole is getting on."

"Good!"

Off they started, accompanied by Tinker.

Now Tinker's face lit up immediately, for when it was a question of visiting the old gentleman, the young darkey gave a pretty shrewd guess that it meant fun.

Fun or mischief—and they were much the same to Tinker.

Now they found Mr. Mole all alone, hard at it, digging away for bare life at his mine.

The new mine-owner had certain difficulties to labour against, but he fought them manfully.

The pick he could ply with tolerable skill, and a certain amount of force.

But what baffled him, at first, was the spade.

To drive it well into the earth, he had, of course, to press it hard with his timbertoe, and this wanted a deal of dodging.

He would lunge furiously at the edge of his shovel, and miss it five or six times in succession, to the infinite amusement of our fun-loving boys.

“If your mine doesn’t turn up trumps, sir,” said young Jack, with a serious air of interest, “you could yet turn your ground to good account.”

Mr. Mole fidgeted nervously at this.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Only in case of accidents, sir,” said young Jack.

“What then?”

“You could cultivate it wonderfully well.”

Mr. Mole did not quite understand the allusion.

“You possess great natural advantages for gardening, sir; you understand?”

“No; that’s it, my dear boy—I don’t understand.”

“Why, look how you could dibble in your cabbage plants or potatoes, for instance,” said Harkaway, junior, as he walked off.

Sold again!

Mr. Mole nearly choked with indignation.

But it was all thrown away, for young Jack was already out of hearing.

* * * * *

Mr. Mole had profited by this allusion to his infirmity.

Amongst the mechanics in the settlement was a very skilful wood-carver, and Mr. Mole employed this man to make him a pair of wooden feet, like lasts upon which the boots and shoes are made.

These were so constructed as to screw firmly on to his wooden extremities.

And thus he vanquished the difficulty of digging with the spade.

"Well, sir," said Harry Girdwood, as they came up, "how do you progress?"

"Fairly, my boy, fairly," responded Mr. Mole, putting on a cheerful air, which was really not warranted by the amount of success he had met with.

"Many nuggets?"

Mr. Mole looked wonders.

If looks could be interpreted, Mr. Mole certainly meant to insinuate a mountain of gold.

"I'm glad it has turned out so well," said Harry Girdwood.

"Especially as we recommended it, Harry," said young Jack.

"You find lots o' brass, old Massa Mole?" said Tinker.

Harry and young Jack felt just a bit uneasy at this familiar term for gold.

But Mr. Mole took it very good-naturedly.

"Lots," he replied with a smile; "in fact—he, he!—excuse my little jokes—I shall have as much brass as you three put together—he, he!"

"Ha, ah, ah!" laughed Harry Girdwood, nudging Jack.

And then they laughed all together.

Isaac Mole thought, in his innocence, that they were laughing with him, not at him.

"I must tell you, sir," said young Jack, with his most respectful manner, "that we had an object in coming here."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"The news of your wonderful mine has got all over the country, Mr. Mole," said young Jack.

"Gossiping fools, to talk of it; it might do no end of mischief."

"It has, sir," said Jack, seriously.

"Never!"

"Oh, indeed it has; in point of fact, sir, we have only now come to see if you fear molestation!"

"Molestation—where?—what—from whom?"

"Morgan."

At the mention of the notorious bushranger's name, Mr. Mole jumped up like a parched pea in a fire-shovel.

"Captain Morgan?"

"Yes, a fact, sir."

"Why, how the deuce can he——"

A disagreeable feeling possessed him, and he could not finish his sentence.

"The danger, sir," said young Jack, deliberately, "from what I have heard, does not proceed from Morgan, directly."

"No?"

"No, sir; for, from information I have received——"

"It sounds just like Scotland Yard," said Mr. Mole.

"Yes, it does; unfortunately, you haven't Scotland Yard here to help you."

Young Jack's serious air and subdued manner duly impressed Mr. Mole.

"My dear boy," he said, "you surely don't mean to say——"

"Don't make yourself uneasy, sir; but the bushrangers have—so I have heard—employed a gang of the aborigines to drop down upon you."

"What!"

"A fact, sir; and so we came on to see if we could render any assistance. We didn't run very hard, for we knew that you were a match for a good many niggers, no matter what country they came from."

Mr. Mole at this pulled up his shirt-collar, and shot out his cuffs, with a pardonable gesture of pride.

"Rather!"

"And we were doubtful," said Harry Girdwood, "whether you would accept our assistance?"

"I'm very grateful for your offer," said Mr. Mole, with dignity; "but I rather flatter myself that I am more than a match for a good mob of niggers."

"Of course, sir."

"It is not known to any of you how I tackled a whole tribe of North American Indians once."

"I remember some thing of it, sir," said our youthful hero; "but I forget the details."

"You would, Jack, you would," said Mr. Mole; "it was just before you were born, Jack."

"It was, sir."

"I'll tell you, then," said the inventive Mole. "I was asleep in our log-house, alone—the rest of our party was away—when I was aroused by the whistle of the savages. But I didn't make any fuss at all.

"No use."

"None," said Harry, pretending to be deeply interested.

"No; so I got up, and got into the loft, with my rifle. On they came, yelling discordantly. I distinguished the chief by his eagle-plume, and, by gad, I potted him!"

"You talk of an Indian chief, sir, as if he were a bloater."

"Or shrimps."

"Well, then, my dear boys, I reloaded, and blazed away again into the thick of them."

"Yes, sir."

"Then, when I had laid seven of them low, out I rushed, and made an awful row. 'Come on, the rest of you!' I cried, as if there were hundreds behind me. I dashed at 'em, and, by the living jingo, I scalped seven-and-twenty before you could wink an eye."

"Lor'!"

"Oh, golly, golly!" cried Tinker, evidently frightened.

"Seven-and-twenty, as I am a sinner!" said Mr. Mole.

"Dear, dear!"

"The other fifty fled as if the old gentleman had been after them, and—would you believe it, dear boys——"

"No, we shouldn't," said Harry, *sotto voce*.

"They actually left me alone, single-handed, master of the field!"

"That's as true as any of Mr. Mole's warlike exploits," said young Jack, tipping the wink to Harry.

"It never got very public," suggested Harry.

"No, publicity is not my desire," said Mr. Mole, with a lofty wave of the hand, "it never was."

"On their own merits modest men are dumb," quoted Jack.

"Precisely."

"Had it only become generally known," said Harry Girdwood, seriously, "Mr. Mole would have been put up as a candidate for the presidency."

"Not only put up," said young Jack, piling it on stiffly now. "but returned, for a dead certainty."

"Oh," said Mr. Mole, "I am not vain or ambitious ;

if I were, there is no doubt but that I could have been elected."

"Your modesty, Mr. Mole, is too much," said young Jack.

"Well, then, I suppose, sir," said Harry, "our assistance, in case the niggers come down on you, would be of no good?"

"Perhaps it might," returned the old gentleman, with a simper of vanity.

"Well, then, it only remains for us to go; we'll leave our pistols first, for we brought them purposely."

"That's very kind of you, Harry," said the old gentleman; "but I have no powder and shot."

"They are already loaded, sir."

He winked at Jack.

"But one charge might not be enough," said Mr. Mole.

"We have no more ammunition to leave you, sir."

They had particular reasons for not leaving powder and shot in Mole's clutches.

You will understand this presently.

"But you are well loaded," said young Jack; "and, with four pistols, you will be able to scatter a whole tribe of savages."

"Rather!"

"You look awful cantankerous fierce, sar; look, sar, as though you eat up dozen niggers," said Tinker, pretending to tremble.

"I don't think they will venture too near me," said Mole.

"Look out for the night, sir," said Harry Girdwood.

"Don't close your eyes."

"I always sleep with the left one open," chuckled Mole.

So off went the boys.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AWFUL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN MR. MOLE AND THE SAVAGES—THE MYSTERIES OF THEIR NATIVE TONGUE.

MR. MOLE chuckled quietly as they disappeared.

"I don't think that the niggers would relish a bout with Isaac Mole," he said, stoutly.

"The rough old commodore,
The tough old commodore."

he warbled.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, his expression losing some thing of its mirthful attribute, "perhaps it would be better if they came in the day. It is difficult to distinguish a dark man on a dark night, and a nigger and night are much the same colour, and I hope they won't come in very great force, ahem !

"Confound those beasts. I wish they would mind their own business instead of worrying about my diggings. And niggers are such very low-minded persons ; they're not satisfied with getting the upper hand, they have such objectionable ways of gouging and scalping ; that's what I have to complain of always."

He looked up at the setting sun, and then he looked at the settlement some distance away.

Ugh !

Why did he refuse the boys' assistance ?

"I am such a rash, headstrong fool," he said to himself. "Pluck is all very well in its way, but really a man with a wife and family like me, ahem ought to pay some respect to his skin. But rash daring was always my weakness ; I am like some old war-horse, I can't smell fighting without snorting to be in it.

"Lord ha' mercy ! what's that ?"

A long shrill note, a profound too-oo-woo. A sort of burlesque of the owl, and unmistakably rendered by a human throat. Mr. Mole had heard such a cry long years before.

Too well did he remember when, where, and under what dreadful circumstances.

. It was in the Island of Limbi.

The war-cry of the savages.

Horrible reminiscence, this, all things considered.

"Too-y-woo!"

"There it is again. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" exclaimed Mole, starting up aghast.

He had been hoping that he was deceived at first.

Now there could be no mistake about it.

In his little tent he kept a bugle with which he was wont to signal to Monday from the settlement when he was in need of any thing.

So he blew a sharp note upon this at once, and waited the answer in some anxiety.

The answer came.

Monday was there, then, ready at hand in case of need.

"Pheugh!"

What a relief!

Mr. Mole could not deceive himself now; he was really alarmed.

He got out his telescope, and eagerly scanned the country round.

Yet no signs of any enemy could be perceived.

"Was it my fancy?" he said to himself. "Surely not, no. Hang it, that would look as if I was frightened, and I rather flatter myself that Isaac Mole is just about the last man in this part of the world to get frightened."

He looked under his blanket for some thing.

Not there.

Where could he have put it?

He routed out several nooks and corners in his tent, and finally produced from beneath a pile of straw a small stone bottle labelled "whisky."

"I'm obliged to be a little bit sly," he said to himself. "Chloe is so dreadfully curious; the way she routs out every hole and corner of this place is most distressing to a man of my outspoken, frank, and truthful nature."

He poured out a little into a cup, and drained it off.

"Hah!" he said, smacking his lips in a sort of subdued ecstasy, "that's something like."

It is astounding how his spirits rose as the whisky went down.

He grew valiant immediately.

"If they don't muster too strong," he said to himself,

"twenty, perhaps—but joking apart, I don't think I could tackle more than twenty."

He got the whisky again.

"Beastly weak this is," he said, taking out the cork; "been well watered before I got it. Awful thieves the dealers are. Why can't they content themselves with an honest profit? Hah!"

He took a suck.

"Two-thirds water."

The old gentleman got rather drowsy soon, and putting his loaded pistols handy, he settled himself down on his blankets to go to sleep.

"Let 'em come, ya-haw," he yawned, "let 'em come—blow the lot to smithereens—ya-haw—knock 'em into the middle of next week—damme, I'd knock 'em into the middle of next year."

And with similar bold resolves, he gradually sank back, and slept.

* * * * *

"Too-y-whoo!"

"Too-y-whoo-oo!"

"Eh, what!" exclaimed Mr. Mole, drowsily; "come in, my dear, don't knock."

"Too-y-whoo!"

"What's that?"

"Wahoo!"

Mr. Mole sat bolt upright, and looked about him.

The alarming sound was repeated once more.

"I was dreaming," he said, "dreaming that I was back in England; I wish I was."

"Too-y-whoo."

"Good Heaven! what a dreadful row."

The awful sounds were close at hand this time.

"The savages."

Yes, there could be no mistake about it now.

Mr. Mole scrambled for his pistols.

Where were they?

He dived under the blanket, under the straw, and all over the tent.

All in vain. He could not feel them.

The sounds of the approaching savages grew more and more distinct.

"Good Heaven!" gasped the old gentleman, "what

a fool I was to drink that whisky. Beastly strong stuff ! Why, it must be over proof."

There was a wild, discordant yell outside, and lo ! at the entrance of the tent appeared three black forms.

Mole shrank back.

Three horrible looking blacks, all besmeared with ghastly pigments.

Two carrying war-clubs.

The third with a bow and arrow, ready to let fly at the unhappy old gentleman.

"Oh-h-h !"

Mr. Mole gave a prolonged groan.

"Don't, for mercy's sake !"

The three savages set up a fearful din, all three speaking at once, producing the most deafening Babel of incomprehensible sounds.

"Oh, goodness me !" cried poor Mole ; "whatever will become of me ?"

"Carajo caramba !" yelled the nigger with the bow and arrow.

"Dear me !" ejaculated Mole ; "it's a Spanish savage."

One of the others carrying the war-clubs advanced into the tent, flourishing his formidable weapon.

"Keri-chi ko kum kemeri thar cum totnamcortrode !" yelled the savage.

Mole shut his eyes, groaning—

"Oh, I'm a dead man."

Never were such sounds heard by mortal ears.

His time was come, he thought.

The other savage came in with a bound.

"Wik wak wallah !" he shouted.

"Exactly so, my dear sir," said Mr. Mole, hoping to conciliate him ; "exactly so, but do take a seat and rest yourself."

"Hikey pikey ticksey wick, sheepsedantators," remarked the savage.

"Never should have thought it, my dear sir," said Mole, in much the same manner that he would have assumed to conciliate a dangerous lunatic.

The third savage lowered his bow and bounded after his comrades.

He flew wildly round Mr. Mole, singing an awe-inspiring dirge.

Then he wound up by saying, in a menacing manner—

“Wah hoo, cantank'rous big duffah. Wah hoo!”

“Oh, Lor'!—oh, Lor'!” moaned Mole, in deep distress, “do keep still there, good fellows.”

But the manner of the other savages tended a little to restore his confidence.

They appeared inclined to treat.

“Buckra warrior Mole,” said one of them.

“Dear me, he knows my name,” said Mole. “Yes, sir.”

“Hokus pokey tikey hi in witechapel par willages com.”

And an awful gesture accompanied this alarming speech, which to Mr. Mole meant the end of every thing.

“Take all—take all!” he groaned, “leave me my life.”

“Buckra warrior Mole,” said the savage, benignantly.

“Morgan say all money—all gold!”

“Ah, you speak English, noble savage,” ejaculated Mole, eagerly.

“Yes, backslang patter sanjiles gric otater can,” responded the savage, with another dance.

“What a very extraordinary language,” said Mr. Mole.

“Some words sound exactly very queer English. So Morgan says all money, all gold?”

“Yes, and buckra warrior Mole's head.”

“Ugh, my head!” shrieked Mole.

The savage took out a knife about six inches long, and executed an Australian saraband.

“It's all up,” said Mole. “Good-bye, Chloe, good-bye to the twins. Good-bye to my dear Jack—to my dear Harvey; I shall never see them again.”

The savage who had before held the bow and arrow, menacing the poor gentleman, had by this time found a stone bottle and taken a suck at it.

The potent spirit made him cough, and choke, and splutter, and then its effects began to tell upon him immediately.

He talked wildly.

“Ole Massa Mole,” he said, with a tipsy air.

“Yes,” said Mr. Mole, looking up; “what is it, my worthy young savage? Only spare my life, and Mole will be your slave.”

“Ole Massa Mole am a gallopshus ole soul.”

"Goodness me!" ejaculated Mole; "I declare, it sounds like Tinker."

The savage giggled.

"Yah, yah!"

This settled it.

Mole recognised him at once.

Filled with rage and indignation, the old gentleman got over his fright in some slight degree, for he made sure that Tinker had turned traitor.

He scrambled up, and before the others could guess what he was at, he made a rush and a blow at Tinker.

Had it taken effect, Tinker would have felt it; but that youthful nigger was knocked off his perch already by the strong drink, and at that very moment measured his length upon the ground.

Mole dashed past the savages to the door of the tent, and then blew a loud blast upon his bugle.

Then off he hobbled as fast as he could go.

The call was answered from the settlement.

"Saved, saved!" cried Mole.

He was not long in reaching his friends, you may be sure.

* * * * *

Now the savages made no attempt to follow him.

On the contrary, as soon as he was gone, the other two followed Tinker's example by rolling on the ground, not in liquor, but in the wildest mirth.

They absolutely yelled with laughter.

And when they had had their laugh out, they went to the tub of water outside the tent and washed their faces and hands with all possible haste.

* * * * *

Mole came back followed by eight armed men.

The foremost were Sunday and Monday.

"Where are the thieves, sar?" demanded Monday.

"Let's get at 'em," said Sunday, pushing forward.

"Here they are, in the tent."

The armed men pushed Mr. Mole on.

The tent was entered and there they saw—

Young Jack and Harry Girdwood squatting on the floor, washing Tinker's face and head with a wet towel.

"Jack!"

"Yes, sir," answered our young hero, looking up.

"And Harry!" ejaculated Mr. Mole. "Why, surely——"

"We've frightened the savages away, sir," said young Jack.

"You have!" exclaimed Mole; "there, I told you so," he added, turning to the men with him, "and yet, would you believe it, for a moment I half thought that you had had the impudence to—to——"

"Hikey pike wahditch and biled owl!" said young Jack.

"With a wak-wallah!" added Harry Girdwood.

Mole started.

"What?"

"Keriki ko liveranbaken wallah!" said young Jack.

This was too much for the audience.

They burst into a regular yell of laughter.

Mr. Mole looked very sheepish.

Then very savage.

Then he thought it best to dissemble.

He knew that unless he could get out of the mess adroitly, he would never hear the last of it.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he grinned, "so you thought I didn't know you! Why, you wild dogs, I knew you from the first—ha, ha, ha!"

"Come, come, I say, Mr. Mole," said Harry Girdwood, "that won't do; you were in an awful fright."

"I," said Mr. Mole loftily, "I should like to see the man who could ever boast of frightening Isaac Mole."

"Then why did you bring all these people with you?"

"Just to show them what fools you had made of yourselves."

But stand out as he would he could not get over it, and it was many a long day before he heard the last of the savages' attack upon his diggings.

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD JACK FALLS INTO TROUBLE—BURIED ALIVE—DESPAIR.

WE must now return to Harkaway, Jefferson, and Dick Harvey.

In the first place we must deal with Jack Harkaway.

Old Jack was the foremost of the expedition, a fact which will not by any means surprise our readers.

His ambition was to rescue his old friend's wife from the clutches of the villanous bushranger, Captain Morgan, to take her back to Dick, and watch the flush of happiness and of gratitude mantle his honest cheek.

"I shall do it, too," said old Jack to himself.

Little did he know what had already taken place.

Little did he think that already Hilda was being cared for by that honest but eccentric little nigger, Tinker.

Harkaway had got a pretty correct notion of the route his friends in advance were likely to travel, and he set out upon their track at a spanking rate.

But unfortunately he veered slightly in his course, with a very sad result.

Instead of coming up with his own party, he crossed the line of the bushranger's scouts.

The signal was passed from mouth to mouth, and before old Jack could realise what had occurred, he was toppled over by an unseen enemy and made prisoner.

"Got one of you," said a ruffian, bending over Harkaway; "you will do, to begin with."

Jack saw that he was, for the time, trapped.

"What's your price to let me go?" demanded old Jack.

The bushranger looked about him.

There were too many of his companions about for him to treat on such a subject.

"More than you could pay, I know. You can talk to Captain Morgan about that."

"Captain Morgan?"

"Yes."

"So I am his prisoner?"

"Yes."

"Let me see him."

"Presently."

"Is he away?"

"Not far?"

"Very good. I wish to speak with him as soon as may be."

Old Jack's idea was that by a liberal outlay he might be enabled to induce the ruffians to part with their prisoner, Hilda.

For himself he thought little indeed, at present.

While this thought was engrossing his whole attention, a voice suddenly exclaimed in his ear—

“So, so, old friend, we meet again once more.”

Harkaway gave a start as he looked up.

“Hunston?”

“Yes.”

“You in league with my enemies, as you ever were?” said Harkaway.

“Aye,” responded Hunston; “and I hope I ever shall be.”

“It is almost time that you repented of your evil ways,” said Harkaway.

“I am going to begin my repentance shortly.”

“When?”

“When I have squared accounts with you,” replied Hunston.

“Ungrateful wretch,” ejaculated old Jack. “Do you forget that I saved your life again and again after a succession of outrages which no other man living would have pardoned?”

“Brag away, brag away,” sneered Hunston. “You play the part of Good Samaritan, and you don’t forget to brag about it. Pah! you were always a sickening cad with your cant, Harkaway.”

The latter was silent.

A flush of honest indignation mantled his cheek.

“Your good opinion, Hunston,” he said, “would be my condemnation—your condemnation is the real compliment.”

This made Hunston writhe.

He could not subdue Harkaway’s courage.

“You can brag, Jack Harkaway,” said Hunston, grinning with fiend-like pleasure as a horrible thought crossed him; “but I’ve got one in store for you that shall make you shake from top to toe like an aspen leaf.”

Harkaway did not even deign to reply.

“Dig the grave,” said Hunston, turning to the bush-rangers.

What! a grave!

Harkaway heard it, as it was meant he should.

But he could not believe it possible that—

No, no.

This was part of Hunston's programme to make him show the white feather.

But there wasn't such an article in the Harkaway wardrobe, as old Jack's friends had often and often remarked. The men proceeded leisurely to dig the grave.

From time to time, Hunston would watch his old foe to see if there were any symptoms of fear about him.

But not a quiver of an eyelid betrayed that old Jack realised what was passing.

Nor did he.

He knew that he was in peril.

Instinctively he felt the gravity of his position.

Yet little did he anticipate the fiend-like cruelty meditated by the heartless villain whom he had forgiven forty times and more, and whose miserable life he had saved over and over again.

"There," said Hunston, "that will do. I don't want it too deep."

"Why, it will hardly cover him in," returned one of the gravediggers.

"That's what I want."

"How so?"

"I only wish to nearly cover him. Leave his head a little out, so that he may not die too quickly, else he'll not taste all the horrors of death to their full extent."

Harkaway felt a little uneasy.

Well he might.

The words of the ruffian implied a dreadful death.

Yet he could not be mistaken.

He was to be buried alive.

Buried alive!

Does the reader fully realise the horrible thought?

It is not easy to grapple with such a hideous reflection.

Yet this was Hunston's determination.

Harkaway, his hated enemy, the one man upon earth for whom he had nurtured the bitterest enmity for a whole generation, was now in his power, and he should taste the bitterness of a lingering death.

Death in its most dreadful form.

Slow torture.

"In with him."

"Ready," said the gravediggers.

The bushrangers seized the prisoner by the shoulders and feet, and dragged him into the newly-dug grave.

Brave old Jack never uttered a word; he was bound hand and foot.

He could not escape from the bushrangers, who surrounded him on all sides.

Yet he disdained to show the white feather to this heartless, graceless ruffian who had, in cold blood, condemned him to such a fate.

"Now beg your life, Jack Harkaway," said Hunston.

Old Jack smiled.

A quiet, irritating smile, far more galling to his enemy than blows would have been.

"Beg your life."

"Of you?"

"Of who else?"

"I wouldn't be beholden to you even for that."

Hunston turned livid with rage, and advanced to strike him, but Jack's bold look made the villain lower his arm.

"Fill in the grave."

The two gravediggers obeyed orders.

A few shovelfuls of earth were thrown over old Jack, and then Hunston bade them hold.

"Now beg your life, Jack Harkaway, of Hunston."

No answer.

"Ask for mercy, Jack Harkaway," he said, "and perhaps I may relent."

"Bah!"

Hunston held the best end of the rope this time, it is true, yet, never at his worst strait, did he suffer more than now.

Hunston felt rage, humiliation, disappointment, all—all together.

Nothing could subdue the valorous soul of brave Jack Harkaway.

"Fill in his grave quick this time," said Hunston.

"Aye, aye, let's get it over."

The spades went to work—such spades as they had—and the unfortunate captive's body was rapidly covered.

"Not over his head."

The eagerness of this showed the villain's intentions clearly enough.

Slow torture!

By that was the death to which he doomed Harkaway.
Where were his comrades now?

Where was Harvey?

Where was the bold and stalwart Jefferson?

Miles and miles away from this, probably.

But would Morgan and the rest of the bushrangers approve of Hunston's thus gratifying his own present spite, and sacrificing the interests of the gang?

Surely not.

The thought had barely crossed him, when he gave a terrific cry—a yell so loud and so sudden that the ruffians commanded by Hunston fell back affrighted.

“Help! To the rescue of Harkaway!”

It echoed all round the place.

But no answer came.

No signs of help.

They piled on the earth, and poor old Jack gave himself up for dead, but his courage was still with him.

“At last, Jack Harkaway,” said Hunston, “at last, after waiting all these years, after going all over the world for it, I have achieved the one absorbing idea of my life. You are done for. Die, die, good Harkaway,” he added, grinning with the intensity of his bitterness, “die like a rat in a trap, but with never a bit of cheese to nibble at—with never a chance of gnawing yourself free. Die, knowing that it is I, Hunston, your old school-fellow, that doomed you to death.”

Never a word did Jack speak.

He gave his villanous enemy a proud, defiant look, even while despair settled upon him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE NICK OF TIME—JEFFERSON TO THE RESCUE—A FATAL FIGHT—TWO TO TWELVE—ROUT OF THE BUSHRANGERS, AND DEATH OF JEFFERSON.

“HARK!”

“What is it?”

“Didn't you hear that?”

“What?”

“I could almost swear I heard a cry.”

"Fancy."

"Perhaps," answered Jefferson; "yet I thought——"

He listened intently again, and a second cry came, fainter even than the first.

Yet it was sufficiently distinct to indicate the direction from whence it came.

"I could swear that I heard it," said Jefferson, with an air of conviction; "moreover, Harvey, I feel sure that it is a familiar cry."

"Whose?"

"Jack's."

Harvey stared.

"Why, Jefferson," he said, "if you did really hear anything, it was so faint that you could certainly not say what it was, even if it was a human voice."

Jefferson made some impatient rejoinder, and looked to his firearms.

"I am so certain of it," he said, "that I am going off to try and be in time."

"In time for what?"

"To save him."

"Who?"

"Jack."

Harvey looked upon his companion as mad.

"If you hear my revolver fired twice," said Jefferson, "come up as fast as you can, for I may want help."

And before they could say any thing more, Jefferson had gone.

He started off at a run, and soon disappeared.

He had passed years in the backwoods, and his hearing was more acute than that of Dick Harvey, or, indeed, of any ordinary hunter, and soon he heard sounds confirming his suspicions.

More cries, louder and more distinct than ever.

Aye, and the voice was now unmistakable.

"Jack Harkaway's voice, for a million!"

He redoubled his speed, and got over the ground like lightning until, at length, he was startled by hearing a diabolical sound of triumphant laughter.

This was followed by a noisy demonstration, in which some half dozen voices joined.

"Strangers!" exclaimed Jefferson, in alarm; "then Harkaway is in the hands of the Philistines, as I feared."

What shall I do? Signal Harvey, and the men, or—no, I will keep my two shots, for I may want them, and they might alarm the enemy to no good."

On he ran until he came to the top of a hill, upon the further side of which a tragedy was being performed.

There was Hunston and his mob of ruffians engaged in burying poor Harkaway alive.

Jefferson took in the scene at a single glance.

He was so close, that he was within pistol-shot.

Out came his revolvers, and taking a rapid, but yet careful aim, he let fly.

Bang, bang! they went.

A cry of mingled pain and surprise came from the bushrangers, as they looked up.

"Hillo, ho, Harvey!" yelled Jefferson.

And down the steep declivity he tore.

"Harvey, Harvey, hallo!" he shouted, as he ran. "Rescue, rescue! Courage, Jack, old boy; here's help."

"Jefferson," replied Harkaway, very faintly.

"Right, Jack."

Hunston turned pale at the sound.

His first impulse was to fly; but shame stayed him.

"Don't run away," said the men, "stay and fight it out."

Two of the bushrangers were down with the first fire.

But now getting in better range, Jefferson blazed away again.

Down went another, howling with pain.

Now we do not mean to say that they would have run away from a single enemy, but in the suddenness of Jefferson's attack, they felt sure that he was followed by a large party, and so they all—with the exception, of course, of the three wounded men—turned and fled.

Jefferson flew up to the grave, and tore wildly at the earth.

It had been thrown loosely over the victim, and so to release him was not a very long, nor a very difficult job.

One stroke of his long bowie knife loosened the thongs which bound him.

"God bless you, Jefferson," said Harkaway; "you have saved me."

Before Jefferson could make any reply, a loud outcry from the enemy attracted their attention.

"Look out, Jack, my boy," cried Jefferson, "they are coming, and we must fight for life."

"Curs!" cried one of the wounded, who was writhing upon the ground. "Eight men run away from one. He is alone."

The flying bushrangers did not want this information, however.

The first fright over, they saw that their alarm was unnecessary. Back they came.

"Look out, Jack, my boy," said Jefferson.

"All right, old friend."

"Take this, Jack."

He thrust his pistol into Harkaway's hand.

The bushrangers came on with a rush.

A shot, at close quarters, was fired from the enemy, and an involuntary cry escaped Jefferson.

"Heaven!" he exclaimed, "I am hit hard, Jack."

"Miscreants!" cried old Jack; "they shall pay bitterly for that."

Snatching up the nearest weapon to hand—one of the spades which had been employed in digging his grave—he dashed rapidly to meet the foe.

Jefferson pulled himself together.

"Now for it."

Nearing them, old Jack made a sudden rush forward, and fired his revolver right into the thick of the rascals, then he fell upon them with his spade.

Two broken heads were the result of his first attack.

Up came Jefferson just as Hunston was reeling back with the shock, and shooting out his sledge-hammer fist, he grassed the traitor like a butcher fells an ox.

The bushrangers were one and all big, powerful fellows; men, in a word, who could always hold their own.

But they had not been accustomed to see such fighting men as Jefferson and Jack Harkaway.

The former went in for all round fighting, abandoning his pistols and knife, and there was scarcely a man there present but received some striking proofs of his prowess.

In less time than it takes us to record the fact, there was not a sound pate present.

He shot out at their heads, and the proofs of the exactness of his aim were shown in bleeding mouths, and flat-

tened noses, while there was scarcely an eye but what was rapidly going into mourning.

Nor was Harkaway idle, as you may suppose.

He did not dispense his favours so evenly as Jefferson.

He singled out such of the ruffians as had shown him the greatest cruelty, and he peppered them in a way that they never forgot.

"Murder!" yelled one of the most cruelly used.

"Take that!" cried Jefferson.

He took it.

It was not at all nice, nor would the man have taken it had he been able to do as he liked.

But it was not a matter of choice.

That was simply a knock on the head, which threatened to put an end to his tricks for many a day.

Down he went, like a stone in a pond.

Now while the fight was going on thus well for our friends, Jefferson and Harkaway—for they had scarcely received a scratch after Jefferson's shot, of which more anon—the bold American gave a sudden cry of anguish.

Down he went.

Hunston, who was sprawling upon the ground, had dealt him a treacherous stroke across the leg with his long knife that had severed the tendons of his knee.

But the dealer of this fatal stroke soon repented of it.

Jefferson fell half upon him.

Badly wounded though he was, he had yet strength enough left to hammer away at the enemy's face.

And soon the villain Hunston was battered out of all recognition.

One of the friends being down, it soon became very hot work for the other.

Poor old Jack was sorely pressed by the enemy.

Yet he contrived to keep them at bay pretty fairly, for he had a strong and dexterous right arm, which they one and all had learnt to dread.

"Shoot him down!" shouted one of the villains. "Who has got a pistol?"

"I have."

"Fire away, then."

A sharp report followed this appeal closely.

But happily the bullet whistled close to old Jack's ear without doing him any damage.

An inch nearer and it would have been awkward.

Harkaway dropped on them in reply.

Ding, dong! he went at the man with the pistol, and his fists did not do as the bullet had done.

They did not whistle past him, but came straight home, and made the wretched possessor of the pistol bitterly repent ever having fired that shot.

The first blow from old Jack's left knocked his head completely out of the square. The man lived long after.

But he never got over the crick in the neck which that doughty blow gave him.

Old Jack was on his mettle.

It was a rare sight to see him drop into those ruffians.

How it would have gladdened the heart of some of his old schoolfellows, and his old college chums, too.

* * * * *

"Jack," called the poor maimed Jefferson, faintly, for his strength was nearly spent.

Harkaway heard him.

But his attention was given to the three cowardly villains, who were endeavouring to topple him over, and he could not even reply for the moment.

"Jack, l—l—lend a hand. It's all over with your old friend Jefferson."

Harkaway gave a heartrending cry.

The word gave him a fresh energy—the energy of despair.

Dashing at his adversaries, he scattered them and ran to Jefferson.

One of the wounded men had spitted him with a knife as they lay side by side upon the ground.

And now the life blood was ebbing fast from the brave fellow's breast.

It was a piteous sight.

Harkaway saw the fatal knife, reeking with the bold American's blood, and it filled him with madness.

He fell upon the destroyer with deep rage in his heart, and gave him no mercy.

But this act nearly cost him his own life, for the rest of the men were upon him in an instant, and he was borne to the ground and overpowered.

* * * * *

Suddenly there were four or five shots fired in rapid succession.

A party of armed men came down the hill at a desperate pace.

It was Harvey and his friends.

The bushrangers, now reduced to three, vainly endeavoured to fly.

There was not a sound man amongst them, for Jefferson and old Jack had so dealt upon them that they could not get over the ground very fast.

Before they could get a dozen yards, they were shot down or beaten to the ground.

The victory was, after all, with our friends.

But ah, at what a terrible price!

Harkaway had three wounds, ugly to look at, but not dangerous.

Alas for poor Jefferson!

He was one mass of wounds, from top to toe.

The knife and the bullet had done their work.

"Harvey," said Jefferson, faintly, "give me something to drink. I shall choke with thirst."

A flask of brandy was placed to his lips, and he drank freely.

The ardent spirit appeared to revive him.

"Hah! that's brave," he said, speaking with evident difficulty for a minute or two. "It can't last long."

"Come, come, Jeff," said Dick; "it isn't so bad as that."

"It is, though," returned the dying man, seriously.

"Where's Jack?"

"Here, Jefferson," said Harkaway.

"Much damaged?" asked the brave American, with a faint smile of recognition.

"No, no—knocked about."

"But not fatal?"

"I trust not."

"Heaven be thanked!" returned Jefferson, earnestly, "for the sake of your poor wife and your boy. Jack, old friend, I am going home fast," he went on, seriously. "I begin to see clearly, now, on certain points."

"What?"

"You must leave these wild scenes. A family man has no right to play pitch-and-toss with his life like that. For

me it is very different. I had nothing to live for, and I shan't live long."

Here he smiled grimly.

"Yes, you will, you must, for all our sakes," cried Harkaway.

"Not I. I feel I am about leaving you all in this world for ever."

"No, no."

"Yes, it is so. That last dig was quite enough to do for me, if I hadn't received my quantity before, which I had. But we have peppered them royally, Jack, old boy."

"We did—we did," returned Harkaway, pressing his hand.

"Harvey."

"Yes, Jefferson."

"Give me another pull at the bottle, while you count up the field."

Harvey obeyed.

Another drink gave the brave man renewed strength, and he awaited Harvey's reply with apparent eagerness.

"Eleven of them."

"Huzzah!" cried the dying American. "That's something. By Heaven, Jack, these vagabond bush-rangers will learn to respect the name of Harkaway for evermore."

The effort cost him dearly, and as the last word passed his lips, Jefferson sank back pale and breathless.

"Jack."

"Yes."

"Dick."

"Here, Jeff."

"Give me your hand—a hand each," said the brave fellow, looking up into their faces. "The end is near—a few moments only, and it will be farewell."

"Jeff, Jeff," exclaimed Harvey, averting his face; "you'll break my heart."

"Don't be a fool, Dick," returned the dying man, changing his humour with quaint suddenness. "Don't regret me, dear boys. Why, if I had to choose my death this minute, I could not hit upon one half so glorious. I have learnt to love you, Jack, as a brother, and to me it is a real happiness to have fallen in saving you. God bless you, Jack!"

Harkaway returned his grip in silence.

His heart was far too full for words.

"You'll have to put me in the grave they dug for Jack," he said, turning to Dick Harvey, with a sad smile. "An odd fancy, that. Good-bye. Think of poor Jeff sometimes, and never regret this glorious day. I'm going to rejoin my dear friend, Brand—poor little Magog! a dear friend to me—and to go to him above, in a better and brighter world, takes away what little bitterness death has for me. Jack, dear boy—Dick——"

His voice grew fainter.

A film gathered over his eyes.

He tried to speak again.

But although his lips moved, no sound came.

It was too late.

A faint, spasmodic quiver of the lips, and the bravest heart that ever beat was still for ever.

The bold Jefferson had gone to rejoin his friend, Magog Brand, in real earnest.

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Slowly—reverently they laid the dead brave fellow in the grave ready dug.

The only funeral service given over him was a silent prayer and the bitter tears of his heart-broken friends and comrades.

"Farewell, dear, dear Jefferson!" wailed Harkaway.

"We shall never look upon such a friend as you again."

"Never," iterated Harvey, bitterly, "never."

"Peace be to his ashes!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. MOLE HAS A WONDERFUL ADVENTURE—HOW TINKER FISHED HIM OUT—A WICKED HOAX.

UNEASINESS prevailed in the settlement.

Day after day passed by, and no news of Jack or Dick, Young Jack and his friend Harry Girdwood did their best to reassure Mrs. Harkaway and the ladies generally.

They were, however, far from comfortable in their own minds.

Where could they be?

Why was there no message?

Some terrible mishap, doubtless, had occurred.

The only person in all the settlement who appeared to take it less to heart than the rest, was Tinker.

The black boy was not wanting in sympathy nor kindly instincts; but he constantly repeated that it was not so easy to get over the ground as they supposed.

Now so lightly did Tinker take the matter—such was his boundless confidence in his master, old Jack, and in Jefferson, Harvey, and the rest—that he kept up his pranks, and kept the settlement generally in a state of commotion by one particular experiment.

He rigged himself up a tent close beside Mr. Mole's, and into this tent, in the dead of night, he conveyed a pick and spade, and a variety of tools.

Mr. Mole eyed that tent with distrust, for Tinker had shown him that he was an adept in the villanous art of practical joking.

Still Tinker kept to his own tent, and never by any chance ventured to intrude upon Mr. Mole.

Meanwhile, Tinker worked as hard as a galley-slave under his own canvas.

No one could guess at what.

Tinker was close.

"Close as wax, sar, dis bewful lubly chile, sar," he said, with a grin, to anyone who tried to fathom him. Mr. Mole was uneasy.

From Tinker's tent came forth the most discordant sounds, which continually reminded poor Mole of that attack upon his mine by the sham savages.

And when he showed at the tent door, the black boy bore very evident signs of having worked very hard. Worked at what?

Mole grew more and more uneasy in his mind.

Was there some fresh conspiracy hatching?

"That beast of a black boy means mischief, I know," said Mole to himself, repeatedly. "Does he mean to rob me?"

Dreadful thought.

Poor old Mole dared not leave his mine.

Waking or sleeping, he dared not leave it. He ate in it.

He drank in it, and wrapped in a thick blanket, he slept

in it, and during his sleep, young Jack and Harry would creep in silently and in the earth place a few small bits of the old brass candlestick, just to encourage old Mole in his search for gold.

Now, although Mole's property has been designated the mine, the reader must not suppose it was an excavation of any very great depth.

The mine consisted of a hole some ten feet span, at the bottom of which was a smaller excavation two feet in circumference, and perhaps about the same depth.

Here it was that Mr. Mole was convinced lay the metal which was to reward him for all he had suffered and undergone in the past.

This was now a spot most jealously guarded by the mine owner, who sat on the side of the pit with his feet in the hole at the bottom of it.

"Now, if I drop off to sleep," said the wary Mole to himself, with a chuckle, "I'll defy Master Tinker or any of the robbers to come and play tricks with my property, without disturbing me.

"Ya-awh, it's astonishing how drowsy I feel," said Mr. Mole, yawning. "I shall knock myself up, if I don't look out—ya-awh!"

* * * * *

Tinker plied pick and spade.

He was always at it.

And why?

There was a reason for it, and that reason was shortly to appear.

"Golly, ain't I wicked?" he said to himself, as he paused in his self-set labour.

"Cantankerous, big, naughty, spiteful I am. Yah, yah!"

He stopped suddenly short in his laugh.

"Who's dar?"

"It's only me, Tinker," answered a familiar voice.

"Massa Jack?"

"Yes," said our youthful hero; "and Harry's with me."

"What you want?" asked the black boy, running up to meet him, so as to prevent him taking a close observation of his work.

"We only want to know what you are doing?"

"Have you found a gold mine, too?" asked Harry.

Tinker replied with a suppressed grin, that rumbled audibly in his inside, as though it threatened some volcanic eruption.

"Massa Jack," said Tinker, pulling a hypocritical face, "I'se awful wicked just."

"We know that you're awful wicked, Tinker," said Harry Girdwood.

"Now tell us what you are after here," said young Jack.

"You no tell nobody?" said Tinker, in a whisper.

"No."

"An' you, Massa Harry?"

"No, no."

Thus assured, Tinker drew near to whisper to them his mysterious secret.

But the joke of the situation so tickled his fancy that he couldn't get a word out for laughing.

"Golly, I 'spects I'se gwine to bust right up wid laughing," he said, holding his sides.

"Well, out with it, Tinker," said young Jack, impatiently, "and let us 'bust up' with you."

"Look hyar," said the black boy, leading them into his digging. "Look at dis hyar funnel."

"Funnel! Oh, you mean tunnel," said Harry Girdwood.

"Dat's it."

"And what's that for?"

"Why, dat funnel goes right away to——"

And here he sank his voice to a whisper, and finished in young Jack's ear.

Harry heard it too.

And then these three young boys laughed until they held their sides.

What could it be?

We shall see.

* * * * *

Mr. Mole dozed.

He yawned.

Dozed again.

And then the unearthly sounds issuing from the next tent aroused him.

"Thought I heard something," he muttered. "Cer-

tainly thought I heard a noise. Very odd. Strange things happen to people. I'm just as if I was taking a foot-bath. Ha, ha, ha !”

The idea tickled him.

“Just like a foot-bath, for all the world. Fancy washing my wooden legs. Ha, ha !”

* * * * *

As Mr. Mole again dozed, a singular event occurred.

The ground beneath his feet was pierced by a thick rod.

This shot up.

Then there was a pause, and presently some water oozed slowly out.

It came on quicker and quicker with a gurgling sound, until the hole at the bottom of the pit was full.

A foot-bath.

It was indeed a foot-bath with a vengeance.

While the wooden limbs were bathed, it was all very well, but the water rose higher, until it reached his flesh.

And then it struck a sudden chill to him, that caused him to rouse up with a shiver.

“What an extraordinary feeling,” he exclaimed ; “just for all the world as if I was sitting in cold wat—hullo !”

He stared in utter amazement.

What could it mean ?

The water rose higher and higher, until it covered his legs and thighs.

This aroused Mr. Mole thoroughly, and he gave a mighty jump out of the hole.

But the water had made it slippery at the edges, and down he flopped, faster than he had got up.

But this time, he went sprawling full length in the hole, only to scramble up again spluttering and puffing.

A miserably ludicrous aspect he presented, when he got up too.

And the water was still rising.

He clutched frantically at the edges of the mine, but the earth crumbled in his fingers, and down he went again.

“Help !” he shouted. “Help, help ! Something’s the matter with my gold mine. Help, help !”

Had poor Mole been less frightened, he might have heard Tinker's triumphant laughter.

"Tinker!" cried Mole, wildly, as the water rose higher and higher. "Tinker! Help, good, kind Tinker! Help, Tinker, you villain. Oh, good Tinker! come and help your old friend Mole.

Tinker came running out of his tent, followed by Harry Girdwood and young Jack.

"Oh, Lor'—oh, Lor', Massa Jack!" cried Tinker, seemingly in the greatest surprise. "Jes' look hyar. Hyar's Massa Mole a-swimmin' like mad."

"Pull me out, you young villain!" yelled Mole.

"What yar washin' yerself for, Massa Mole?" inquired Tinker.

Mole made a grab upwards, but missing his hold, down he dropped again, and was covered with the water.

"Beast!" he cried, as soon as he could get his breath.

"Pull me out, you young black beast!"

"Yes, sar," answered Tinker, as coolly as if the matter was one of no urgency whatever. "Wait till I get my fishing rod."

"You devil!" cried poor Mole. "I'll have you whipped."

"Yah, yah!" laughed Tinker.

"You'll suffer for this."

Tinker laughed in his aggravating way, and took an elaborate double sight at Mole, who writhed with rage and with the unpleasantness of the situation.

"The water is rushing in quicker. I shall be drowned. Help me out, oh! I'll kill you!" yelled Mole, shaking his fist up at him.

"Den I no get you out," cried Tinker, running away.

"Tinker, Tinker!" cried Mole. "Good Tinker, do help me out."

Tinker slowly returned.

"Dat's better," he said. "And now," he added, gravely wagging his forefinger at the unfortunate gold digger. "You be good boy for the fewsher?"

"Yes, yes!" gasped Mole.

"Den out you come."

Saying which, he let down a rope, and pulled the old gentleman out.

Once free from the water, he hoisted him up, until Jack

and Harry were within reach, and they helped drag him free.

Tinker sat on the ground, laughing at the miserable figure old Mole cut at that moment.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. MOLE MAKES AN AWFUL DISCOVERY—THE TEST OF THE GOLD AND THE EXTINGUISHER NUGGET.

"WHY, however did the accident happen, sir?" asked Harry Girdwood.

"I struck on a spring, I suppose," replied Mole.

The three boys exchanged significant looks.

"No doubt, sir."

"Good lot of springs, Massa Mole," said Tinker, grinning.

"I should almost think so," said Mr. Mole, shaking the wet off his hair and face; "now, look here, Tinker."

"Yes, sar."

"Just you run up to the big house and get me a change of clothing."

"Yes, sar. Oh, sar, I tell you what you look like, sar; you look like a splendiferous water mole, sar; yah, yah!"

"Fly!"

"Yes, sar."

Tinker ran off, just in time to save himself from a lump of mud Mole was about to throw at him.

And while he was gone, Harry and young Jack strolled round Mr. Mole's gold and water mine.

No sooner were they gone than Mr. Mole was seized with a fit of curiosity.

"What can that boy Tinker have been after there?" he muttered to himself.

So looking about him to see that Harry and young Jack were occupied elsewhere, he stepped into the tent and—

"Goodness me!"

There was a huge hole in the ground which almost rivalled the mine itself.

"This is a very singular thing," said Mr. Mole aloud.

"Niggers and monkeys are almost kindred. This young Tinker has been seized with a fit of imitation. He's been digging because I have been digging."

He drew nearer.

The excavation which Tinker had so laboured at went in a slanting direction so as to reach, at its bottom, the depths of Mr. Mole's celebrated mine.

This was a very singular fact to Mr. Mole.

"There's something in that," muttered the old gold-seeker to himself. "Some deep villany; why, what can this be?"

A pipe.

An iron pipe, and fitted into the top of it an immense funnel which seemed to indicate that it had been used as a water-pipe.

Mole staggered back, and looked about the tent, when his eyes dropped on to a big tub of water, half sunk in the ground, close by the pipe and funnel, but which had been momentarily concealed from view by a mound of the earth thrown up out of the tunnel.

"There's something in this more than meets the eye," said Mr. Mole, to himself. "That tub is to supply the water which is poured down the pipe by means of the funnel. That is clear enough. But where the deuce does this water-pipe lead to? Where? Unless into my gold mine?"

It flashed across him at once.

And as the trick dawned upon his startled imagination, he could only find one word in which to express his utter disgust and indignation.

"The little black beast!"

As this epithet escaped him, he heard the voice of Tinker, shouting—

"Where am de old water mole?"

"Come along, Tinker," cried young Jack. "What a long time you've been."

"De lubly Missie Mole wouldn't gib me de Mole's fings."

"Little beast," muttered Mole, under his breath, "I'll 'fings' you."

By this the irate old gentleman meant to convey a novel form of punishment which Tinker was very far from expecting.

He quietly dipped a pail of water from the tub and waited.

Crouched up behind Tinker's own tent.

Holding Tinker's own pail of water.

"Where is Massa Mole?"

"Isn't he there?" demanded Harry Girdwood.

"No."

"Look round."

"He ain't dere, by golly," said Tinker. "And I'se got such gollopshus bewful close for him, all dry and warm—ha, ooh!"

The latter ejaculation was elicited by the sudden dashing of the bucket of water from behind the tent into the young darkey's face.

"Take that and that," cried Mole, rushing out and giving the surprised Tinker a vicious thump with the now empty bucket; "undermine me, will you? Flood my property? Make a water mole of me, and try to drown me, will you? Take that and that."

And at each word he laid it on pretty hard.

Tinker scrambled up when the first surprise was over, and bolted off to a safe distance.

"Ugly ole man, with nasty legs," cried the smarting Tinker, taking a sight.

This aggravated Mole again, and round he went after him at a dashing rate.

But Tinker was an awkward customer to try on a race with, for he dodged and doubled in a way that would have surprised the most active people.

He was here, there, and every where in a jiffey, bounding about like an india-rubber ball.

Presently he was down.

"I have you now!" exclaimed Mole.

No! Mr. Mole had *not* got Tinker, for that active black youth nimbly rolled aside and was on his feet in an instant.

Then he waited until the old gentleman was close upon him, and bolted off just as the other thought he had him in his clutches.

At length Mr. Mole, fairly pumped out, was obliged to sit down and pant for breath.

"You young black viper," gasped Mole, "I'll have you tied up and flogged within an inch of your life."

"Yah! ooh! you turn old nigger-hunter," jeered Tinker, from a safe distance.

"Bring me my dry clothes, my boy."

Tinker never moved.

"Do you hear, sir?"

"Yes, sar. Dis chile hear bewful, only he don't come."

Threats being of no avail, Mr. Mole called for assistance to young Jack and his companion, who stood near enjoying the scene.

"Bring me my dry clothes, Jack, my boy."

"Can't, sir."

"Why?"

"They're wet."

"Why, you don't mean to say that that beast of a boy——"

"Not a beast, sir," replied Jack. "You wetted them yourself, when you doused the water over that rude Tinker."

"I shall catch the lumbago and tic-doloureux and sciatica, and all the rest of it," Mole answered

"Yes, sar," grinned Tinker, "you get de ticbago, an' de asiatica, an' all de family of dem tic things."

"Fiend!" yelled Mole.

"Yes, sar."

"Devil!"

"Yah, yah! dat's me, sar," responded Tinker, cheerfully.

Mr. Mole tried threats and denunciations until he saw that it was of no avail.

And then he returned to coaxing, and in this way was happily more successful.

Tinker was induced to make a second journey to the house for more garments, and so Mr. Mole got a dry rig-out.

* * * * *

"My opinion is," said Mr. Mole, dubiously, "that you are all in this job."

Young Jack and Harry Girdwood protested their innocence; but protested in vain.

"I wouldn't believe you on oath," said Mr. Mole, "not either of you, but I'll tell you what. I'll look over it all on two conditions."

"What are they, sir?"

"Firstly, that you help me undo the mischief you have caused."

"And next?"

"That when you have helped me draw off the water, you don't mention a word of this to any body."

This they willingly agreed to.

They set to work with a will, and it was a very short job.

The water sank into the earth when they had got a bucket or two of it out.

So that it was all but a matter of a few hours' work.

When the mine was clear they set to work digging with Mr. Mole, and strange to relate, they had not been long at work when they came to some very remarkable results.

Young Jack was digging vigorously at a new part on the higher ground when Mr. Mole caught sight of some thing glittering in the shovelful of earth that the boy had turned over.

"What's that?"

He bounced eagerly upon it.

"A nugget!"

"Never!"

"It is, it is!" cried Mr. Mole, joyously.

He rubbed off the earth sticking to the metallic object of his excitement, and then revealed the nugget, which was of the most curious shape.

It was a cone and hollow.

"Why, bless me," said the excitable mine-owner, with a puzzled air; "it looks for all the world like an extinguisher."

The boys could no longer contain themselves.

A general explosion followed; they burst into a yell of laughter that might have been heard in the settlement hard by.

Mole looked up.

What could it mean?

A dreadful suspicion flashed across his mind as he fell to rubbing furiously at this newly-discovered nugget.

"It is, it is!" he cried, in despair, "a brass extinguisher."

"Lubly gold dat, sir. Tinker glad to turn water mole to get such lubly gold."

"You—you—you——"

He had exhausted his vocabulary of abuse, and could not think of any name vile enough for the black boy.

"Bewful, gollopshus nugget, dat 'stinguisher, Massa Mole."

Mole groaned.

He had never said a word, but scrambled out of the diggings and went into his tent, where the small bag of nuggets was hidden.

Dragging it out, he applied the test—it is strange that he should not have thought of it before, but he had had no suspicions of trickery—and it all proved to be like the extinguisher.

Candlestick gold, melted down by Jack and Harry.

His anguish on making this discovery could only find vent in one word.

"Sold!"

He was.

"It's a robbery, too," he exclaimed in his indignation; "an infamous conspiracy and a robbery—those boys were in it. I'll have them all trounced—Harkaway shall know of it."

He paused.

If Harkaway knew of it the tale would fly all over the settlement, and he would not dare to show his face for months.

When he reflected, he felt rather ashamed of the greed of gain that he had shown in his purchase of the mine.

He knew that he had been chuckling over the way in which he had got such a grand bargain out of those two unsophisticated darkeys, Sunday and Monday—at least he thought—and he knew that on that ground he was not justified in making it a ground of serious complaint.

But he could not swallow the transaction.

"Listen to me, you boys," he said, severely.

"We'se listenin', sar," responded Tinker, promptly.

"I didn't speak to you," retorted Mr. Mole tartly.

"No, sar; dis lubly child spoke to you, sar."

"Hold your tongue."

"Bless my 'art," said Tinker, "ain't Massa Mole in a immense cantankerous big temper? Yah, Tinker run and fetch some rum to mix wid the water Massa Mole swallowed, yah, yah!"

"You have been joining in a swindle," said Mr. Mole, not deigning to notice the irrepressible Tinker. "That's just what your practical joking has led you into."

"A swindle?"

"Yes."

"But you haven't read Sunday's letter."

"What letter?"

"He told me that he had left a letter for you in the tent."

"My tent?"

"Yes."

Mr. Mole ran back to the tent and looked eagerly about him.

"There it is."

Yes, there it was; a big white paper, pinned with a wooden skewer to the canvas wall of the tent in a prominent place enough, but one which had hitherto escaped Mr. Mole's attention.

"DEAR BRUDDER MOLE,—

"You wanted to buy a gold mine for nuffin or thereabout, and so you was sold yesself. I can't rob my own relashin, an' so I return your money, less the price of the candlestick. An' we don't charge nuffin for the amusa-tion [probably the writer meant 'amusement'] that we have give you, brudder Mole, nor nuffin for this bewful moral lesson agin greed of gold. So no more jes' at presenk from your own brudder,

"CÆSAR HANNIBAL A. JEX,

"Common known as SUNDAY."

"Done for!" groaned Mole, as he concluded this singular composition.

"Yes, sar, done brown, not black, sar."

Tinker was there at the entrance to the tent, nodding and grinning.

"Done for Massa Mole, sar. Done for bewful luscious brown. Yes, sar."

Mr. Mole used a naughty word, and rushed at him.

But Tinker was off.

And when he got out he saw young Jack, Harry Girdwood, and Tinker, stepping out towards the settlement, at a smart pace.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter of those mirth-loving young practical jokers rang in his ears, and caused him the most lively apprehensions.

"It will never do to let them carry that tale to the settlement," said Mr. Mole; "I shall never hear the last of it. I had much better compromise the matter with them. Join in the laugh at my own expense. Ugh!"

That was a pill to swallow; but he got it down as best he could, and made up his mind promptly.

* * * * *

"Here he comes."

"Mole?"

"Yes."

"Shall we run?"

"Yes, sar," responded Tinker. "Dis bewful infant means to bolt."

"Stop a bit," said Harry Girdwood, looking back; "whatever is he after now?"

They turned round, and saw Mr. Mole coming along as fast as he could stump it, and waving a white pocket-handkerchief at them as he came.

"A flag of truce, by the living jingo!" exclaimed Jack.

"So it is."

"He's afraid of the chaff."

"I'se gwine!" cried Tinker. "Me not let him catch dis nice infant."

"Stop, stop!"

But Tinker was not to be coaxed into this.

He had not got the same faith in a flag of truce as his more civilised companions, and he was already back in the settlement with Sunday and Monday, while Mr. Mole came on chatting with the two boys, making the best of his misfortune.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MOLE LEADS A RELIEF PARTY IN SEARCH OF OLD JACK.

WHEN the settlement was reached, there was a discussion going forward which turned them all from gay to grave at once. Bad news had arrived about the absent friends.

A messenger had come in from Harkaway, announcing the unfortunate death of the brave Jefferson.

Sunday and Monday were holding a meeting with several of the most trustworthy of the settlers, and volunteers were invited to join a relief party.

Young Jack and his brave companion, Harry, would fain have gone with the party, but this could not be entertained for a moment.

Somebody must remain to guard the settlement, for it was just possible that the bushrangers, who were known to be very numerous, would discover the comparative weakness of the place, if a sufficient guard were not kept.

In that case, in all probability, they would make a descent upon them and take them by surprise.

As Tinker—whose advice, although couched in his own peculiar phraseology, was invaluable now—explained to them, the bushrangers knew the country so much better than the settlers did, that it would be comparatively easy for Morgan to detach a party and send them down upon the unprotected people at home.

They had plenty of men for the service.

"Somebody must command here," said Mr. Mole.

The old gentleman quite forgot his little private grievances in this state of affairs.

"Of course," said Harry Girdwood; "there must be a leader that we can all look up to."

"What do you say to Mr. Mole?" suggested one of the men.

"Not I," returned Mole; "I'm going after our dear friends, to see if I can take one life for poor Jefferson's."

"You are going with the volunteers?" said Harry.

"Yes."

"You must not, sir," said young Jack.

"I shall!"

His voice and manner showed a degree of firmness to which they had not been accustomed.

And, indeed, do what they would to move him, it was of no avail.

He was as firm as a rock.

All his old eccentricities of character seemed to vanish before the alarming state of things which the messenger of ill had brought them.

"Well, then," said one of the settlers, "who is to be named leader here while you are all away?"

"Let us vote."

"Good."

"I propose that Jack Harkaway, junior, shall be nominated," said Mr. Mole. "He's very young for the post, you may say, but he is a worthy son of a worthy father, and when not at his monkey tricks, he has his head screwed on the right way."

It was put to the vote, and carried unanimously.

Mr. Mole needed no better revenge than this if he could only have thought of it, but his mind was full of more serious matters, for the generous eulogies pronounced by the old gentleman made our hero feel very uncomfortable over his share in their little wickedness of the gold-mine hoax.

* * * * *

"And now we're off," said Mr. Mole, shouldering his rifle.

"Already?"

"No time like the present," replied the old gentleman; "besides, who knows what is going on now? Who can say what sort of a fix our dear boys are in?"

"On we go," said the volunteers, eagerly.

"Keep a careful watch, Jack."

"I will, sir."

"Mind your sentries are posted everywhere, and frequently relieved."

"Trust me, sir."

"I do, my boy, I do," said Mr. Mole, shaking his hand warmly. "God bless you. Right about face, quick—march!"

And off they marched, the remaining settlers sending a ringing cheer after them to help them on their way.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HUNSTON'S PUNISHMENT—HIS COMRADES JUDGE AND CONDEMN HIM—THE EXECUTION.

HUNSTON was badly hurt in the fatal fight.

But not dead.

As he lay stretched upon the ground surrounded by the dead and dying, he dare not move hand or foot lest they should revenge upon him the death of Jefferson.

But when the triumphant enemy had moved a little way off to pay the last sad tribute of respect to their lion-hearted dead, Hunston contrived to crawl into the low brushwood and hide himself.

Here he lay, a prey to the most violent anguish of his wound, and devoured by fever.

He would have given any thing for one drop of water.

Hour after hour, he lay there parched—choking.

And when some hours had thus gone by, his sufferings, instead of diminishing, were terribly increased by the anguish of his arm.

The mechanical limb seemed like a ton weight dragging upon him.

And up that shoulder shot sharp burning pain that made him cry out in spite of himself, so cruelly poignant were his sufferings.

He tried to free himself from the arm, but vainly.

Whether it was that in his agony he did not go to work in the right way, or whether from weakness or the confined space in which he lay concealed, he could not move it.

The old superstitious feeling came back.

He felt that the murdered Emerson's legacy of hate was at last dragging him down.

"It's all over now," muttered the guilty man, hoarsely; "all over, and Emerson will not be deceived; he must have his hand in my last agonies. Oh, if I could but drag it off—ugh!"

A fearful groan escaped him, and he sank back half helpless.

He remained in a state of semi-stupor for half an hour or more, and as his consciousness came back, his pains returned with more than their former force.

"I was a fool to hide away," he murmured. "If I had remained in sight, they would have finished me off, and I shouldn't be now dying a death of torture. Oh, that someone would come and put the finishing stroke to me now."

Barely were the words uttered when he heard the sound of voices near at hand. Familiar voices, too.

"There's the spot, Captain Morgan; and see here, captain."

It was one of the men who had taken part in the late encounter with Harkaway and his party.

The only one who had got off comparatively free.

This man had fled in good time, and coming by accident across Captain Morgan, had related the fact in the most favourable light for himself.

He had run away, according to his own account, simply because he was not sure whether Hunston was acting under orders or not.

This hit Captain Morgan on his tender side.

He was a strict disciplinarian, and most jealous of his authority being usurped by anyone.

"What!" exclaimed the notorious bushranger, "six men killed outright."

"Yes, captain," replied his informant, "six that we know of."

"I wish we had only got Master Hunston here," said Morgan, bitterly; "he should not have much chance of taking such a job upon himself again."

Hunston heard every word of this quite distinctly.

"He can't have got far, captain."

"Why not?"

"He was badly hurt."

"So much the better."

Hunston winced.

There was not much hope or comfort in this for him.

"Call your men, Barber," said Morgan, "and let them look after this Hunston."

The bushranger's men were summoned, and then an active search for Hunston began.

They were not long in routing him out, and he was brought before Morgan to be tried and answer for the calamity he had caused.

"Now," said Morgan, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"Only this," replied Hunston, faintly, for he was exhausted with his sufferings; "I have lost my life in fighting in your cause."

"That's false," retorted Morgan. "You sacrificed my men in trying to gratify your own private spite."

"And yours."

"My affairs had no place in your mind," said Morgan, sternly, "and you know it."

"Haven't I paid the penalty for it?" said Hunston. "I am done for."

"Not yet, but you may be. Hark you, my men, this fellow has come amongst us to sacrifice the lives of our comrades for his own purposes. He tried to torture a man to death. Now, Harkaway is no friend of ours."

"No, no."

"True, he is not, but we are men, not cannibals or wild Indians. We can kill our enemies in fair fight, but not bury them alive."

"No, no."

"What shall we do to him for this?" said Morgan. "What can we do to him for causing the death of so many of our best and bravest comrades?"

No answer came.

"Speak."

The men were still silent, and Hunston began feebly to hope.

"Is hanging too good for him? It is, but we must show him more mercy than he would show to his enemies. Who has the rope?"

One was speedily brought.

Hunston said never a word.

A sickening dread had fallen upon him, but he knew well that no appeals for mercy would be entertained by these men. He merited none.

One end of the rope was cast over the branch of a tree, and a noose was made in it.

The arms of the condemned man were fastened behind him.

The noose was placed round his neck.

A slight tremor of the neck was perceptible as the fatal cord touched his flesh, but he said nothing.

A dull, settled look was upon his face, and strange to relate, at this awful moment he had quite forgotten the present, and was back in the past.

All the events of his old life passed in rapid succession before his eyes, and pang after pang of regret shot through his hardened heart.

"Have you any thing to say?" demanded the bush-ranger.

No reply.

"Sulky, are you?" said Morgan, brutally. "We'll cure that for you. Pull away, lads!"

The next moment Hunston was dangling in the air.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MEETING WITH HARKAWAY'S PARTY—THE SCOUTS AND THEIR NEWS—A BRUSH WITH THE BUSHRANGERS—HOT WORK—HOW MOLE KEPT HIS ENGAGEMENT.

MOLE's party made forced marches until they came up with Harkaway and the rest of them.

We pass over the warm greetings which were exchanged—the eager inquiries that went forward on either side.

"I'm very glad to see you, old friend," said Harkaway to Mole, "but yet sorry that you should have ventured out on such an adventure as this."

"My dear Harkaway," replied his old tutor, "Isaac Mole knows how to take care of himself."

"Of course."

"He flatters himself that he never shrinks from work when a friend is in danger," said Mr. Mole, with a touch of his old dignity, "but I hope to show you, Harvey, that I have yet some steam left in me."

"I don't doubt it for a moment, sir," said Harvey.

"I'm afraid you do."

"No, no."

"You wouldn't be here, sir," said Harkaway, "if you hadn't got as much of the old fire in you as ever."

This gratified Mr. Mole more than any thing.

While they were engaged in this conversation, there was a wild "whoop" or cry, and a black man, dressed in a small pocket-handkerchief only, bounded up to the spot.

Mr. Mole jumped back.

"What's this?"

"It is Wangi, a scout we have engaged," replied Harkaway. "He knows Tinker, and all about Morgan and his men."

"Is he reliable?" asked the cautious Mole.

"Quite."

Wangi was a bright specimen of an ugly race, and he was full of intelligence.

They had come across him just at the right moment, for the bushrangers had been ill-treating the unfortunate fellow, and he was smarting under a sense of injury, both physical and moral.

He had been so kindly used by the Harkaway party that he was eager to render them every possible service.

"Well, Wangi," said old Jack, "what have you discovered this time?"

"Morgan warrior close," replied the scout, pointing to the direction he had come from.

"How far?"

"Close, so close."

"The deuce he is. Are they in force—many warriors there with him?"

"Four—six—ten."

"Ten?"

"Yes."

"And Morgan, that makes eleven."

"Morgan can count for three," said Dick; "he's quite as good as three of the others."

"Quite."

"Then Morgan, the great bushranger, shall be my especial care," said Mole.

"Oh!"

Harkaway thought it over seriously awhile.

"Yes," he said, with an air of resolution, "let us go on; we must exterminate these miscreants."

The scout now explained that the bushrangers had

caught one of the Harkaway party, and were about to make short work of him.

"You are wrong there," replied Harkaway, "we are all here present."

The scout explained that it was at any rate an enemy of theirs, and a white man—hence his reason for presuming it to be a member of the Harkaway expedition.

"Perhaps it is one of Morgan's band."

"No friend—no bushranger," said Wangi, with a positive air. "Catchee catchee——"

"Oh, they caught him, did they?"

"Yes. In the bush; all bad—so bad."

"What, wounded?"

"Yes."

"This is very strange," said Harkaway; "let us hurry forward."

"There's some ugliness going forward," said Harvey, "and we are bound to be in it."

"And as for this Captain Morgan," said Mr. Mole, with a swagger, "let him look out."

They hurried forward, and after a rapid march, the scouts came running back with warning gestures.

"They are hanging a man," said one.

"Hanging!" ejaculated Harkaway.

"Yes."

"Do you know their unfortunate victim?"

"No."

"Is Morgan there?"

"Yes," replied the scout, and a big, foreign-looking fellow, who must be the Italian brigand chap I have heard so much about."

"Toro?"

"Yes."

"Come along, then. We have got our work to do," said Harkaway, as he loosened his pistols in his belt, so as to be ready for use.

They crept up noiselessly until they were within twenty feet of the bushrangers.

Then, upon a preconcerted signal, they fired a volley and rushed on.

The bushrangers were taken by surprise.

Then a stampede occurred, and Morgan's voice was heard in fierce tones.

"You white-livered scoundrels," he cried, turning round indignantly, for he found himself alone in the open.

He saw the enemy coming down upon him in all directions, and he never attempted to move, but boldly faced them.

This example was soon followed by his men in very shame; back they came to the support of their chief.

There was a momentary pause, and the bushranger chief was the first of his party to break ground.

He cocked his rifle up to his shoulder, was just upon the point of delivering his fire, when Mr. Mole stumped forward and hurled his hat at him.

It served the purpose of putting him off his aim.

Else Dick Harvey would not have lived to join further in the encounter, for the bushranger's aim was deadly, and he meant the shot for Dick. Now, while they were variously engaged thus, Harkaway rushed to the tree where the wretched Hunston was dangling, and cut down the body.

At the self-same instant a shot was fired which entered the right breast of Hunston.

At the same time, Captain Morgan made a rush at his assailant—Mr. Mole—and being as active as he was vigorous, he soon toppled the old man over.

Mole was awfully frightened; but he clutched his rifle tenaciously, and swinging it round his head, he brought it down with tremendous force on Morgan's arm.

The next moment Mole pulled the trigger, and then fell backwards.

"Bang!"

At the self-same instant, the bushranger chieftain was heard to groan, and clapping his hand suddenly to his chest, he staggered and fell. Dead!

Yes, the redoubtable bushranger, Captain Morgan, was dead.

And his conqueror was Isaac Mole.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SUNDAY'S LAST TUSSLE WITH TORO—VICTORY.

MR. MOLE soon realised the fact of his victory, and he was not slow to take advantage of it, for he was not the man to lose a bit of any possible glory in such a lucky stroke.

"Behold, I have finished Captain Morgan," he cried, as he got up from the ground; "now smite the rest of the villains—smite 'em hip and thigh; charge!"

There was a cheer from the settlers.

The bushrangers turned tail on seeing their leader fall, and fled precipitately, just as Toro appeared on the scene.

"Harvey," cried Harkaway, holding Hunston in his arms, "look at this wreck of a man. Wangi," he added, to the scout, "bring me some water. He is not dead; he has only fainted, I think."

With infinite pains they brought Hunston to consciousness.

And while Harkaway held his old enemy in his arms, Harvey, Mole, and Monday followed the defeated bushrangers closely up.

A regular panic had seized upon them, and they fled madly.

In vain did Toro endeavour to rally them.

The Italian bully, with all his many defects, was no coward, and he was wild with rage and disappointment at their ignominious flight.

"Stop, cowards," he cried, "stop; stand and face them."

On they fled, faster than ever.

"Curse your white livers," he cried; "go then and leave me. If you are afraid, I am not. I'll show you how a brave man can face his enemies."

This heroic speech had no effect whatever upon them.

They increased their speed and disappeared.

Toro launched one final curse after them, and turned to face the foe.

On came the Englishmen, and with them the two darkies, Sunday and Monday.

"Don't fire," cried Dick, who could not help admiring the boldness of the Italian ruffian.

"We shan't take him alive," said Monday.

"I know it," returned Harvey; "but give him a chance as we are four to one. Leave him to me."

"No," cried Monday; "he shall be my job."

"Never."

"It shall be no one's job but mine," said Sunday, with a dash of firmness and dignity in his tone that few would have expected to find in this humble negro. "We are old enemies. He ill-used me when I was oppressed, and felt ground down by the bondage of slavery; but I have learnt since then to feel like a man, and I will see to him now; so stand back."

And then, before they could offer a word of remonstrance or objection, the sturdy negro rushed forward, alone.

Now Sunday had nothing better to help him in his encounter with so redoubtable an antagonist than a short dagger knife and a stout heart.

But he never quailed an instant.

"I've come to fetch you, Toro," said the darkey, boldly; "so give in quietly."

Toro made no reply.

The audacity annoyed him.

So much so, in fact, that he was in a measure taken by surprise when the bold darkey leaped upon him, knife in hand.

"Take dat."

Toro got it.

The knife had only about five inches of blade, but the Italian got it all, up to the very hilt, in his shoulder.

With a cry of rage and pain, the Italian closed with his adversary, and grabbed at the knife. But Sunday was ready.

Wrenching the knife away with his whole force, he severed the fingers of Toro's right hand, and jobbed away again viciously.

This second blow took effect in his cheek, inflicting a hideous-looking wound, which was not, however, so serious as the former blow.

Toro shook himself free, and swinging round his brawny arm, he dealt the luckless negro a terrific blow which floored him.

The spectators gave a cry of alarm at this.
Their man was done for.

The Italian fell upon him with his whole weight, half crushing the luckless black.

But what Sunday wanted in strength, was fully compensated for in extra activity, and he grappled eagerly with the foe.

A desperate and fatal struggle ensued.

Over and over they rolled, the Italian hammering away at poor Sunday's head in a way that threatened to batter his skull in.

But a negro's skull is proverbially thick.

Sunday's was no exception to the rule.

He took his punishment without any particular noise, never attempting to dodge a blow, but giving his sole attention to that ugly little knife.

And as they rolled over, he stabbed and stabbed again with such fierce energy, that the Italian's huge body was a mass of wounds.

At length, Toro seized the unhappy Sunday with his left hand, and holding him momentarily at arm's length, he dealt him one slaughtering stroke that sent him lifeless to the earth.

But this was Toro's final effort, and almost at the same moment, he shook all over and fell across his lifeless antagonist with a dull, hollow groan.

Harvey rushed forward to raise the negro, but first they had to drag the giant Italian off him.

Toro offered no resistance now.

He slid through their hands to the ground, and as he lay on his back, he looked towards the lifeless negro with a sickly smile of triumph, and so his features grew rigid with the horrible look upon them.

"He's dead," exclaimed Mole, in an awe-stricken tone.

It was true.

The redoubtable brigand Toro had seen his last skirmish.

He would never trouble anyone of his enemies again.

* * * * *

"Poor Sunday ! "

" He's only swooning."

" I fear not."

Sunday showed that the latter speaker's fear was justified, for as the words were spoken, he opened his eyes.

"Whar's de big beast?"

"Hush, Sunday," said Mr. Mole; "it's all over. The wretched, misguided creature is dead."

"And a good thing too—sarve him right," responded Sunday, heartily.

He scrambled on to his feet, but he was what fighting men know as "groggy," and could hardly keep up.

His head was swollen to twice its ordinary dimensions, and his body was knocked into a jelly.

Yet the stout-hearted darkey never thought of his own hurts when he looked at his stalwart opponent, lately so full of life and vigour, but now stiffening in death.

They were old enemies, and Sunday, although not brutal by nature, could not help chuckling at his victory.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HUNSTON'S LAST MOMENTS—HARKAWAY'S GENEROSITY—SAD MEMORIES AND BITTER REGRETS—EMMERSON IS AVENGED AT LAST—THE LEGEND ON THE MECHANICAL ARM IS FULFILLED—THE DEATH OF HUNSTON.

"HUNSTON! come, look up, man."

Hunston opened his eyes, and looked wildly about him.

"Where am I?"

"Here, with Harkaway, your old schoolfellow, Jack. Say, how is it with you now?"

Hunston glanced upwards, and his eyes rested upon his old schoolfellow and college chum, the man he had so cruelly wronged and plotted against throughout his misspent career.

"Is it you, Harkaway, or do my eyes deceive me?"

"No," replied old Jack, sadly, "I am here, Hunston, here with you, to help you, old fellow, if I can."

Hunston's head was resting upon Harkaway's knee, but he could not believe that this was a proof of his old enemy's forgiveness.

His evil nature could not comprehend such nobleness of heart.

"I am in your power, Harkaway," he said, "but not for long—no, not for long."

"Hush!" said old Jack. "Don't talk like that now. Tell me what I can do for you."

"Do for me?" repeated Hunston, vaguely. "Nothing; they have done for me without your assistance this time. No, no, nothing—Emmerson has done it."

And he pressed his shoulder above the mechanical arm.

"Emmerson?" said Harkaway.

"Yes."

"What mean you?"

"His legacy has avenged him," responded Hunston. "I feel the subtle poison coursing through my veins. Nothing could save me. Sooner or later Robert Emmerson was to be avenged. I have escaped the knife, the bullet, and the rope. I could laugh at them all, for I knew that I bore a charmed life, and that nothing could touch me—nothing but Robert Emmerson. His cursed skill has done for me, and it has baffled the greatest doctors one and all. The legend on the arm is fulfilled. I am paying the forfeit of a life's misdeeds, but not to you, Harkaway, not to you; it is the poison in the arm."

The look upon the wretched man's face told such a piteous tale, that Harkaway turned his head away visibly affected.

"You have got the best of it, Harkaway," pursued the dying man, speaking now with evident difficulty; "but the wretched glory of conquering a poor outcast like me doesn't belong to you; it belongs to the dead and gone—to Robert Emmerson, not to Morgan, either. You'll look after Morgan, Harkaway?"

When one upon whom death had already set his seal talked in this strain, it was inexpressibly shocking.

Harkaway turned his head away and sighed.

"You can spare Morgan your enmity now, Hunston," he said, seriously.

"Why?"

"He has gone before you."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"You are deceiving me," said the dying man, sharply.

"Why should I? I tell you Morgan has already paid the forfeit of his crimes. He is dead."

Hunston's eyes sparkled with evident satisfaction at this intelligence.

"That's brave news," he said. "I shall cheat you all—Morgan—you—all—all but Emmerson. He is not to be balked. I feel the deadly influence of his work stealing round my heart, and crushing the life out of me slowly—slowly, but ah, how surely."

His voice grew fainter yet, and Harkaway moistened his lips with the water that Wangi had brought.

This gentle action evidently surprised the suffering man.

"Come, come, Hunston," said Harkaway, in a kind voice, "tell me if there is any thing that I can do for you."

"You are mocking me," said the dying man.

"Not I, by Heaven!"

"Is it indeed possible, Harkaway, that you can forgive such a guilty wretch as I am?—that you can pardon all the evil I have wrought against you and yours?"

"I can," returned Harkaway; "I can and do, freely."

"Do you forgive my last act of cruelty?"

"I do; don't speak of it," said Harkaway, gently.

"You are the most wonderful of men," faltered Hunston, "too good, too noble-minded for a base nature like mine to understand. Ah, Harkaway, what a different being I might have been had I been able to resist my evil instincts as a boy. Contact with you should have elevated me, and brought me to something better than this. But no, it seemed only to tend to the very opposite direction. The better you were, the more generous and forgiving, the viler and baser I became."

"Oh, Jack, Jack!" he exclaimed, in bitter remorse.

"Oh, if I could only wake up to find that it had all been a dream! But no, no, Jack, death is stealing round me now, and will not this time be shaken away."

And then a sudden change came over his face.

"Jack, I am thinking now of our schooldays! Ah, Jack, if those times could come again, how different I would act, to you and yours!"

He held out his hand to Harkaway.

"Jack—I must call you Jack, now. Hold my head higher, Jack—there."

His voice grew fainter and fainter.

"Will your wife forgive me?" he murmured.

"Yes, yes."

"And your boy, and Dick Harvey, and Mr. Mole?"

"All—all, willingly, freely," returned Harkaway, much affected.

"Bless you for those words of comfort. I—pay my debt," he went on, speaking now with the greatest difficulty, "my debt to all."

Then after a moment's pause, he said, faintly—

"Jack, pray for me; ask your wife, Emily, to pray for me."

And with these words upon his lips, his head dropped upon Harkaway's knee, and all was over.

Hunston fell back dead in his old schoolfellow's arms.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE END OF THE BUSHRANGERS—HOW TINKER LED HIS PARTY TO A BLOODLESS VICTORY—A SIGNAL TRIUMPH.

"BEHOLD, all of you, Captain Morgan is dead, and it is I—Mole—that have done the daring deed," said Mr. Mole, with a self-satisfied air; "and I feel comparatively at rest, having rid the country of such pests."

"You?"

"Yes, I alone."

His hearers stared at the cool audacity of the old gentleman.

He did not scruple to assume the honour, and glory of all that had been done.

"Yes," he added, complacently, while the rest stared and waited for a whacker; "I never did a thing better than this job, perhaps, and that is saying some thing."

"Yes," added Harkaway, drily "it is certainly saying some thing."

"It has always been my principle," said Mr. Mole, looking around him for admiration, "when I take a job in hand of this kind, to finish it right off. Nip 'em in the bud, sirs."

"Bravo!" cried young Jack.

"Cut 'em up root and branch, no half measures."

"Hear, hear!"

While Mr. Mole continued blowing his own trumpet in

the most brazen manner, young Jack whispered a word or two to Tinker.

The latter grinned and disappeared.

"You mustn't suppose," said Mole, with a sort of deprecating smile, "that I think I have done all by sheer force of arms."

"Oh, you are too modest," said old Jack, winking at Harvey,

"Oh, no."

"Well, now, that is a very manly and generous admission," said Dick.

"Ahem! I know as well as you do that the name of Mole has gone for some thing, that it lent a sort of moral weight to our expedition. A good leader's name is a tower of strength. The bushrangers had their spies, and when it became known that Isaac Mole was in command, I leave you to guess how completely they became demoralised."

"No doubt."

"Oh, of course they would for you," said Harvey.

"In fact, if I had this job to do again, I should merely let it go forth that Isaac Mole commanded the party, and then I should——"

"Down with old Mole!" cried a strange voice from the bush.

"Prepare your firearms. The bushrangers are on us," shouted young Jack.

A couple of rifle-shots followed.

Then came a great shout.

"Down with Mole!"

"Oh, Lor'! oh Lor'!" exclaimed poor old Mole; "where shall I get to?"

It was royal fun to see him stump away; in fact, you could hardly understand how he got over the ground at such a rate.

And as he disappeared, Tinker came out of the cover, followed by Sunday and Monday.

"Gollupshus great big lark!" said Tinker, holding his sides, and grinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But the point is," said Rook, "that the bushrangers are by no means exterminated."

"Aye, but the one or two that yet remain are dispersed,

and will never gather together again about this part of the country."

"There's the rub," said Rook. "I'm told that five of the leading men after Captain Morgan are encamped up at the creek yonder."

"Never!"

"It is true."

"Do you think they mean mischief, then?"

"Undoubtedly; they are by no means so demoralised as Mr. Mole would make us believe."

"We know whar to find de beggars, sar," said Tinker.

"You do?"

"And could lead us there?"

"Believe yar, my boy," responded Tinker; "walk up behind 'em, too; take immense dam big salt box, sar, and put a pinch on dere bressed tails."

"Bravo!"

"Let us keep this job to ourselves," said Harvey, "or we shall alarm the ladies again."

"Good."

"Who shall go?"

"You and I," said Harkaway, "and Rook."

"Yes," said the latter, eagerly, "I'll go."

"An' me too," said Tinker, "me go and put all the lot in a bag—a bressed big gollopshus bag, sar."

"Come along then, off we go," said Harkaway, who was all impatience to get to work, as usual, when once the thing was decided upon.

Tinker led the way, and the three combatant members of the expedition followed.

Each man had his rifle slung behind his back.

In their hands they carried each a brace of pistols.

It was necessary, for the sake of precaution, to reach the creek by a circuitous route, and this involved a considerable loss of time.

But the black boy Tinker proved to be a model scout.

Every inch of the ground was known to him.

After a long march their patience was rewarded.

Tinker, who was marching on about twenty yards ahead of the party, turned round to them, and pointing to a thicket at no great distance, motioned to them, inviting the greatest caution and prudence.

The critical moment was rapidly approaching.

As they drew near the thicket, they saw the grey smoke curling up above the shrubs, and they understood now that they must prepare for some stiffish work.

It proved to be less serious than they anticipated.

They opened out, and each of them took up a separate post, and in this way they advanced and pushed their way through the bushes.

The bushrangers, who were five in number, were, as might be seen at a glance, worn out by the recent fatigues which they had undergone.

Four of them were stretched upon the ground around the wood fire, wrapped in their rugs, asleep.

The fifth, who was mounting guard, had been overtaken also by slumber, and was resting in a state of semi-drowsiness upon his rifle.

Tinker made this man his mark at once.

Creeping like a tiger up behind him, he dealt him one alarming blow with a heavy wooden club upon the back of the head.

And down dropped this untrustworthy sentinel like a log.

Tinker leaped upon him.

He had a rope all ready to hand with a running noose in it, and this he slipped over his shoulders, fixing his hands down his sides immovably.

The noise, slight as it was, sufficed to arouse the sleepers, and when they opened their eyes, they found themselves faced by three armed men.

Three desperate men, each holding a brace of pistols.

"Move a step, either of you," said Rook, "and we fire."

"Wake up, men ; help !"

"Another word, a sound, and it is your last utterance."

Now the bushrangers were not wanting in courage, but they were completely overmatched.

"Yield !"

"Never to you !" cried the man.

"Hold your tongue, Morris," said Rook, unceremoniously. "You have no chance, and you had better take it quietly."

The bushranger never uttered another word.

He was completely bewildered.

"Tinker."

"Yes, sar."

"Bring a rope."

"Yes, sar."

"Tie him up."

"Yes, sar, I will, sar ; dis chile do it awful double quick."

He dropped down upon the bushranger Morris, and in spite of his resistance, succeeded in fastening his arms as securely as he had done those of the unfortunate sentry.

To secure the others was the work of a very few minutes.

What could they do ?

Nothing.

They were surprised—utterly—hopelessly taken at a disadvantage.

"Now get up and march," said Harkaway.

They obeyed.

To hesitate was dangerous, seeing that they were faced by three armed men, not to speak of Tinker, who, in his excitement, was really no mean adversary.

"Wake up you warmint," said Tinker, giving the insensible sentry a kick.

As this failed to arouse him, the dose was repeated until the man was brought round.

And when they were all upon their feet, Tinker started them by prodding them on their respective rears with a wooden spear he carried.

"What are you going to do with us?" demanded the bushranger, Morris, sullenly.

"Put you in a place of safety," responded Rook.

"What!" echoed Morris, recognizing the speaker for the first time, "is it you, Rook?"

"As you see."

"Traitor!"

"That's false," said Rook; "I am no traitor. I was never one of you. I was forced into playing a loathsome part. Morgan turned traitor to me. If ever I owed him and you any allegiance, that freed me."

"Where would you take us?"

"Where you will be unable to do any further mischief."

"Then we had better fight it out here, comrades," said the bushranger, suddenly, facing round.

"No; you had not," retorted Rook. "Not if you are prudent. Your lives are safe. Resist, and they will not be so long."

"Curse your" luck, growled one of the prisoners ; "we have no help for it."

"None."

"March," said Harvey ; "I'm getting tired of this."

"Spikey," cried Tinker, inserting about an inch of his wooden spear in the sentry's back.

"Oho !"

"March."

And march they did.

CHAPTER XL.

SURPRISE—THE BUSHRANGER'S WIFE—RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS—ROOK AND TINKER FIND THEMSELVES IN GREAT PERIL.

THE town in which the sheriff of the county lived was about fifteen miles from the spot where the lawless remainder of Morgan's demoralised band had been captured.

There was a lock-up there, and a magistrate could examine them before they were sent to prison.

All the bushrangers had their arms bound behind their backs.

As they marched silently along, they looked very crest-fallen and woebegone.

Jack wanted to get back to the settlement without delay.

He did not see the use of taking the captives with him.

They would have to go, ultimately, to the sheriff, who was an energetic man named Hardrock.

The town which he graced with his presence was called Masdon.

He was extremely popular, and a terror to evildoers, though the bushrangers had long held him at defiance.

Through coming frequently in contact with him, Jack knew him well, and had every confidence in him.

After marching a few miles, Jack called a halt.

He and his party were provided with water-bottles and sandwich cases.

They felt the necessity for some refreshment and a brief rest.

The bushrangers were permitted to sit down under the shade of some gum-trees.

"I must have a bite of something," said Jack, "and a drink of water, for I'm parched."

"Same here," replied Harvey. "The sun's warm to-day, and no mistake!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Tinker. "That am right. It hot enough to scorch the tail off of a brass kangaroo."

"What do you know about it?" asked Jack.

"Dat's my opinion, sar."

"Next time, when you've got one, be kind enough to keep it to yourself."

"Dey won't keep, sar, unless I put dem on ice, and I don't know where we're going to find dat perishable commodity in dis here bush."

"You know a lot, don't you?"

"Been dragged up somehow, sar," replied Tinker.

"Don't you think, Rook," said Jack, "that you and the boy could take the prisoners up to the sheriff without Harvey and I?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"You are acquainted with the way to Masdon?"

"As well as you are, sir."

"And, if I am not mistaken, you have met Mr. Hard-rock, the sheriff of the county?"

"Once or twice."

"Very well," continued Harkaway. "You can deliver these rangers into his custody."

"With pleasure," replied Rook.

"He will understand what to do with them."

"Put them in the lock-up, I guess."

"Tell him they are the remnant of Morgan's band, captured by me."

"They are as harmless as dried snakes, sir," said Rook.

"I and Tinker can do the business."

"Up to de knocker," chimed in Tinker.

"That settles it," answered Harkaway. "Harvey and I will return to the settlement."

"As you please, sir."

It was arranged that Jack and Harvey should go back alone to assure their friends of their success.

Rook and Tinker were to conduct the defeated rangers to the town of Masdon.

Here they would deliver them to Mr. Hardrock, the sheriff.

Their doom was the gallows.

Well had they merited the fate in store for them.

After partaking of the refreshment they had brought with them, the party separated.

Harkaway and Harvey walked back to the settlement.

Making the rangers rise, Rook and Tinker started them on the road to Masdon.

They imagined that they had an easy task before them.

In this conjecture they found that they were mistaken.

Morris, who had been Morgan's lieutenant and fast friend for years, did not appear so dejected as his companions.

"Mister," he said, addressing Rook, "would you be charitable enough to give a chap who's down on his luck a chew of terbacker?"

"Like a shot," replied Rook, good-naturedly. "Why didn't you ask before?"

"Didn't like to."

"Here you are."

Rook took a piece of navy plug from his vest pocket, and breaking a bit off, put it in Morris's mouth.

He began to chew it vigorously.

"Bet your boots," he exclaimed, "I won't forget you for this, if ever you should be placed in a hole and I'm by."

"Tain't my fault you're going to be landed."

"I know that; it's that infernal Harkaway that's got his knife in us," said Morris.

"Don't call him names."

"I feel bad over it."

"Mr. Harkaway is a fine fellow, and every inch a gentleman."

"He's been too clever for us."

"Hasn't he had enough to put up with from your gang?" asked Rook.

"Maybe; but we haven't got the steel yet. The key isn't turned on us."

"What do you mean?"

"Morgan had a wife and a brother."

"So I have heard. What of that?"

"Mrs. Morgan is a regular amazon. She used to work with us, and we called her Fighting Sue. She had a

baby, and Morgan built her a house near Masdon, in the woods. Morgan's brother Bob lived with her, pretending to cut wood and sell it; but Morgan took his booty to the house."

"Aren't you giving him and her away?" queried Rook.

"That don't matter," replied Morris.

"How's that?"

"We've had private information that Fighting Sue and Bob are coming on the warpath to avenge the death of the king of the bushrangers."

"Is that so?"

"Fact. I don't mind telling you. I'll bet they'll bring some of the boys with them. They know the road. We aren't landed yet, by a long way."

Rook looked grave.

So did Tinker.

There might be trouble yet before they reached the town of Masdon.

Both held their rifles tighter, and prepared for a possible encounter.

"Yes," continued Morris, as if talking to himself, "I ain't lost all hope yet."

"Shut your mouth, you fool!" said one of his companions, named Daggersberg.

He was reckoned the most bloodthirsty member of the band.

There was no act of cruelty, however atrocious, that he would hesitate to commit.

When robbing a house, after killing the father, he would take a baby from its mother's arms, and throw it up in the air, when he would empty his revolver at the hapless, innocent infant.

All who knew him called him the Terror.

"I ain't saying nothing out of the way," replied Morris.

"You're talking private business, and if I had my hands free, I'd give you a lick in the mouth."

"It would take a better man than you to do that."

"Perhaps some day I'll make you eat those words," retorted Daggersberg.

Morris held his peace.

He was induced to do so by a peculiar sound in front of him.

It was the cry or note of a bird, only found on the Australian continent.

This bird is known as the laughing jackass to the settlers.

There was nothing extraordinary to Rook and Tinker in the cry.

But it had a peculiar significance for Morris and his captive friends.

Long ago, Morgan had adopted this call as a secret and private signal and warning for the bushrangers.

If they were in any trouble, or lost in the bush, or wanted help, or wished to communicate with one another, this was their call.

It was not difficult to learn.

Morris could imitate the bird to perfection.

Again the weird, startling note was heard.

This time Morris answered it, his heart beating wildly.

He felt sure that there was some meaning attached to it.

Ardently he hoped that the wife of the dead bushranger was not far off.

Fighting Sue would not come alone.

She was sure to bring some reliable fighting men with her.

Scarcely had the cry escaped his lips, than a reply was heard.

There was a bend in the road.

Rook and Tinker were ahead of the prisoners, and as they turned the corner they halted.

Though they held their rifles cocked, ready for use, in their hands, they did not attempt to discharge them.

Right in front of them was a woman on a black horse, which she bestrode like a man.

She wore moleskin trousers, also masculine fashion, a loose tunic, confined at the waist by a girdle, and a broad-brimmed felt hat.

This was Fighting Sue, the widow of Morgan, the dreaded bushranger whom Harkaway had brought to his doom.

She was tall, stout, stern, and hard-featured, but not wholly devoid of good looks.

At one period of her life, when younger, and before care and trouble fell upon her, she had no doubt been handsome.

She had let the bridle-rein fall on the horse's neck, the animal standing quiet in the middle of the road.

In each hand she held a seven-chambered revolver, with which she covered both Rook and Tinker.

She could have killed either of them at a moment's notice.

Behind her, on foot, were grouped six strong, rough-looking men, who were armed with Winchester rifles.

In their belts they had stuck both knives and daggers.

They had their guns at the shoulder, and only awaited their mistress's command to fire.

"Hold up your arms!" shouted the amazon. "I am Morgan's widow. Surrender, or you are dead men!"

Rook and Tinker had no option but to comply.

They had been completely taken by surprise, owing to the sudden appearance of the party in front of them.

The bushrangers just behind Rook and Tinker recognised friends among those supporting Fighting Sue.

With a dejected air, Rook let his gun fall to the ground and threw up his arms.

This example of total and unconditional surrender was immediately followed by Tinker.

The black boy could have cried with vexation.

But there was no help for it.

In a moment the six men who formed the band of Fighting Sue advanced.

Two of them picked up the rifles that had been dropped, and also deprived Rook and Tinker of their pistols.

They were then not bound, but handcuffed together, like malefactors of the deepest dye.

The men had made a raid on a police-station in a town they had passed, and the handcuffs had been stolen therefrom.

No time was lost by the others in releasing their friends.

Then there was a general and cordial shaking of hands.

Bob Morgan, brother of the deceased bushranger, greeted Morris, and Daggersberg clasped the not very delicate hand of Fighting Sue.

"We did not expect to meet you so soon," said Sue, "nor did we think to see you in custody."

"Your messenger came to us in the bush," replied

Daggersberg, "and reported that you were coming to join us with half-a-dozen good men and true."

"Quite correct. I have lost no time since my poor husband's death."

"You will avenge it!"

"Will I not, by heaven!" exclaimed the woman, passionately. "That is why I am here."

"We will nobly support you."

"Of that I am sure. I have always heard Morgan speak most highly of you."

"If there was a post of danger to be filled, he usually assigned it to me."

"How do I come to find you prisoners?" asked Fighting Sue. "I was making for your camp."

"It is broken up," answered Daggersberg.

"How—by whom?"

"That meddlesome fellow, Harkaway, pounced upon us, and before we could defend ourselves, we were captured."

"Harkaway again! He has been our curse," she said, bitterly. "Where is he?"

"He and his friends, with the exception of the two who had us in charge, have gone back to the settlement lately made called Harkawayville."

"I have heard of it as a thriving place," exclaimed Sue, adding, "Are these men, the white and the black, of note?"

"They seem to be thought a lot of," replied Daggersberg.

"Keep a sharp watch on them. I give them into your care for the present."

"No fear of me neglecting them."

Morris and the other two men now came up to and thanked Mrs. Morgan for her timely succour.

Daggersberg fell back and placed himself in front of the manacled captives.

"It's a queer world," remarked Rook.

"I reckon the world won't trouble you much longer," replied Daggersberg, brutally.

"If so, I can't help it; but if we fall, our death will be fully avenged."

"We chaps will run the risk of that. You are counting on your pal, Harkaway?"

"Of course I am," said Rook, "and he's thoroughly reliable, too. If we don't turn up at the settlement between this and to-morrow morning, there'll be a row."

"You won't, then, I can tell you."

"Have you heard what's to be done with us?"

"Take that, and don't presume to ask any more questions," cried Daggersberg.

As he spoke, he struck Rook a blow on the mouth, which loosened his teeth and made his lips bleed.

Presently the order was given to march.

Fighting Sue, Bob Morgan, and Morris had been holding a consultation.

It was decided to enter the bush, and as soon as they came to a stream, to form a new camp.

The old one was to be finally abandoned.

The widow intended to follow her husband's lawless profession.

And, above all things, to avenge his death upon Harkaway and those who were associated with him.

Two men were detailed to guard the captives, one being Daggersberg.

After leaving the high-road and entering the bush, they did not proceed more than three miles before they came to the very spot they required.

It was a piece of ground sheltered by scrub and trees, through which ran a stream.

A halt was called, a fire was lighted, some dampers made, and a portion of a kangaroo, which Morris had shot, was nicely broiled.

Stakes and boughs were cut ; the stakes driven into the ground, the boughs interlaced to make walls ; grass was pulled to fill up the interstices ; a roof was formed, and soon each man had a hut to sleep in.

A superior one was erected for the widow.

When the shades of night began to fall, and the air grew cooler, they piled more branches on the fire and sat round it.

The prisoners, over whom Daggersberg watched, were the subject of their conversation.

Mrs. Morgan did not attach much importance to Tinker.

He was only a black boy, whom she thought might be spared to make them a servant.

Rook, however, she was inclined to hang on a tree by the roadside.

Some body passing along would be sure to see it, and disseminate the news.

This would be a direct defiance to Harkaway.

Only one of the band raised his voice against the proposal, and that was Morris.

He had promised to befriend Rook if he could, and he kept his word,

But he was overruled.

The members of the band were not inclined to entertain considerations of mercy.

After a parley, it was decided, with only one dissentient voice, that Rook should die.

Tinker was to be the camp servant and odd boy, with a stone attached to a chain round his foot to prevent his running away.

Rook was condemned to be hanged by the roadside, at daybreak the next morning.

Mrs. Morgan wrote, in pencil on a piece of paper, words to the effect that he was put to death by order of the widow of the late bushranger, and the sentence executed by members of her band.

This placard was to be fixed to his breast.

It was, indeed, throwing a challenge at law and established authority.

When this was settled, Bob Morgan proposed that his sister-in-law should be made the head of the band.

He further suggested that she should be known as the Queen of the Bushrangers.

Both propositions were carried by acclamation.

Morris said that Bob Morgan should be lieutenant, which was agreed to.

The camp was to be known as Morgan's Nest.

Their objects would be to plunder houses, rob travellers, and be revenged on Harkaway and his friends.

When all was arranged, Daggersberg was told to inform Rook of his fate.

This was a congenial task to the bushranger.

The rest of the band retired to their huts.

Overhead the stars were shining brightly in the dark vault of heaven.

Tinker had stretched himself on the ground, but Rook sat up.

He looked at Daggersberg, and a tremor came over him.

CHAPTER XLV.

ROOK'S FATE—SNATCHED FROM THE GRAVE—THE LAW'S DELAY.

It was a chilly night, the wind having suddenly changed.

A cold blast swept shrilly through the branches of the trees, and rain fell at intervals.

Sailors would have termed it squally weather.

Daggersberg was the sentry appointed for the first half of the night, and, as we have stated, was ordered to inform Rook of the doom which awaited him on the morrow.

He was of Dutch extraction, and, like most of his compatriots, a great smoker.

For a time he walked up and down, his rifle on his shoulder and his pipe in his mouth.

Then he knocked the ashes out of the bowl and went up to Rook, who, still seated under a tree, was gazing vacantly at the expiring embers of the fire.

Now and again the wind would fan them into a fierce blaze, and anon they would almost die out.

"My friend," exclaimed Daggersberg, "I have sad news for you."

Rook looked up.

"That is no more than I expected," he replied. "You bushrangers have not much of a reputation for mercy."

"No one shows us any," remarked Daggersberg.

"Do you deserve it? Why don't you work for a living, instead of robbing people?"

"I like the life; and as for work, there is plenty of that about it, let me tell you."

"How long have you been at it?"

"Going on five years; ever since Morgan started."

"You'll get wiped out before long, only you can't see it," replied Rook.

"Not by the sheriff," Daggersberg laughed. "He has

tackled us several times, and always got the worst of it. We know Sheriff Hardrock, of Masdon, and he knows us."

"That may be so. You forget, however, that if the sheriff holds aloof, you will have to account to Harkaway if you injure me or that black boy who is sleeping by my side."

"He is safe," answered Daggersberg. "The Queen of the Bushrangers has decided to keep him as a servant."

"If you reckon on keeping that boy, you make a mistake. He'll cut and run."

"Not if we hobble him, with a piece of wood fastened to a chain round his leg."

"He'll skip, for he's as 'cute as they make them. Young Harkaway sets great store by him."

"We don't care a snap of the fingers for the Harkaways and their party."

"You'll have to. None of you know them so well as I do. The elder Harkaway is a masterpiece," said Rook.

"If you keep the boy you'll rue it. But to business."

"That's what I was coming to."

"What's my fate to be?"

"You've got to have your neck stretched, my boy, early to-morrow, so if you know any prayers, you'd better rake 'em up," replied Daggersberg.

A shudder ran through Rook's frame.

The sentence of death had not been expected by him.

It was hard to be hurried out of the world in such a sudden and cruel manner.

Then there was the ignominy of a death by hanging.

It was the fate of a common malefactor.

"You'll be sorry for it," he exclaimed. "Harkaway might have left you alone if you'd not interfered with me and Tinker."

"Can't help it; the band have decided against you," rejoined Daggersberg.

"Have I no friend amongst you?"

"Only Morris. He spoke up for your life."

"You can get money for my release by sending to Harkawayville."

"It's no use holding out any hope to you, old son. The queen and Bob Morgan are full of revenge for the death of the greatest bushranger Australia ever produced. They mean to hang Harkaway before they've done."

..That's all talk."

"I don't know so much about that," said Daggersberg, with a thoughtful shake of the head.

"Leave me to myself, will you please?" replied Rook.

"With pleasure."

"You've told me that I have to look eternity in the face very shortly, and I want to think it over."

"It's a sure thing; don't hope."

"I'm no coward, but I'm not in the humour for talking."

"If I could help you, I would."

"Help me," repeated Rook. "You can if you choose."

"How?"

"Set me and the boy free. We will make tracks for Harkawayville."

"That would cost me my life."

"Come with us and I will make a man of you. What are you now?"

"You can answer the question as well as I."

"An outlaw, a bushranger, a bandit," said Rook.

"More than that," replied Daggersberg, gloomily.

"Tell me," asked Rook, under his breath.

He knew that this man had a fearful past.

Were it not so, he would not have been in the position he was.

Only fugitives, criminals of all sorts, became bush-rangers.

"Murderer!" replied Daggersberg, calmly.

"Whom did you kill?" asked Rook.

"My wife. It was her fault."

"That is why you are a fugitive from civilisation?"

"Nothing else. If I went back from the bush, they would have me, and do with me as the queen and her people will do with you to-morrow."

"Say no more; I am resigned," Rook answered.

He fell back and closed his eyes.

Daggersberg resumed his patrol.

In due time, he was relieved by Bob Morgan, being very glad of a few hours' repose.

When the dawn came, Morgan was joined by Morris.

After a few words, they roused Rook and Tinker, who for some time had been fast asleep.

To the leg of the black boy they riveted a chain, at the

end of which was securely fastened a heavy log of wood.

"What are you doing to this child?" asked Tinker, when the operation was completed.

"That's just to keep you steady," replied Morgan.

"I's right enough."

"You've got to be the bushrangers' servant—slave, if you like to call it so, for you'll have to wait on the camp."

"Get more kicks than ha'pence, I guess."

"Right you are, if you don't behave yourself," said Morgan.

"I've got to grin and bear it."

"No mistake about that."

"What's the berth worth, old cornstalk?"

"A smack side of the head, if you let your tongue wag."

"Is Mr. Rook in it?"

"No; he isn't taking any. He is going to stretch his neck, so you may say good-bye."

Tinker's face became grave.

He showed by his looks how much he felt.

The two shook hands.

Then Rook was told to march after Morgan, who led the van, Morris bringing up the rear.

The latter had, coiled over his right arm, a long, thick rope.

Silently they threaded their way through the mazy bush.

The rain had ceased falling, but the wind was blowing half a gale.

It made mournful music in the tree-tops.

In an hour, the main road between Masdon and Harkawayville was reached.

Morgan and Morris led their prisoner a few paces down the road.

They halted close to a tall tree that had been struck by lightning some years before.

About three feet above their heads was a scathed, barkless bough.

Though dead wood, it was still strong enough to sustain the weight of a man.

Over this the rope was thrown.

A noose was made at one end, and there was rope

enough left to tie round the trunk when the victim was drawn up.

The slip-knot was placed round Rook's neck.

His arms were already bound ; as an additional precaution, they tied his legs together near the ankles.

He seemed perfectly unconcerned.

In reality, however, he was not so.

The man was thinking deeply about the possibilities of a future life.

Death was coming to him very suddenly.

There were passages in his career which he could have wished blotted out.

Who is there among us who has not one or more regrets for conduct in the past?

He was making his peace with the Power that alone could show him compassion.

"Good-bye," said Morgan.

Morris took hold of the end of the rope.

He only awaited the signal from his accomplice to haul away.

"Farewell," replied Rook, "I die with no ill-feeling or enmity towards any one. You have my forgiveness for the crime you are going to commit."

"Swing him !" cried Bob Morgan.

Morris gave a pull at the rope, and Rook was taken up at least three feet from the ground.

The rope was then made fast round the trunk of the blasted tree.

The victim of the bushrangers' hate did not sustain any fracture of the vertebræ, as is usually the case in death by hanging.

This was because there was no drop.

He was doomed to a more painful death—namely, one by slow strangulation.

In a few moments his face became a horrible sight.

Morgan and Morris, hardened and callous as they were, turned away from it, sick at heart.

It was more than even they could stand.

The placard, worded and written by the queen, had been pinned to his vest.

It set forth that the man had been condemned and executed by order of Susan Morgan, Queen of the Bush-rangers.

The conclusion was : "Success to anarchy."

Rook's face became almost black with the pressure of blood.

His tongue lolled out, swollen and discoloured.

His features were hideously distorted, and his eyes nearly started from his head.

"Come on," exclaimed Morgan. "We have done the trick. I can't bear that sight."

"Nor I. It's a thing to dream of and wake up in the night with the horrors," replied Morris.

The limbs twitched convulsively.

Rook's eyes seemed to be watching their every movement.

"I wonder how long he will be dying," remarked Bob Morgan.

"It takes some time to die of strangulation," replied Morris. "Shall I try it on you? Let me put my fingers round your throat."

"No, thank you."

"I'll leave off before the critical moment comes. You can tell me what you think of hanging as a mode of capital punishment, and whether it hurts much."

"Don't be a fool."

Saying this, Morgan grasped his companion's arm and dragged him into the bush.

They immediately disappeared amidst the trees and scrub.

The body of Rook was left to swing mournfully in the fresh breeze.

Scarcely had Morgan and Morris quitted the scene of their rascality, than a most remarkable thing occurred.

It seemed like a direct intervention of Providence on behalf of the wretched man.

Two persons suddenly appeared on the opposite side of the road.

They had evidently walked across the open grazing ground which intervened between them and the settlement.

One was Jack Harkaway and the other his old friend Harvey.

Thinking nothing of a long walk, they had started early to go to Masdon, and find out what the sheriff was going to do with the bushrangers.

It was their belief that Rook and Tinker would be entertained by Sheriff Hardrock with proverbial colonial hospitality.

They could not do less than stay the night at his house, and the best part of the next day.

Judge of their astonishment when they saw, right in front of their eyes, a body swinging in the air.

Convulsed as the features were, they could see that the victim was no other than Rook.

How long he had been hanging they did not know.

There was no possibility of their finding out.

"Good Heaven ! look there !" Harvey exclaimed.

"It is our friend Rook," Harkaway replied, drawing his large bowie knife.

"What are you going to do ?"

"Cut him down."

"He looks too far gone for our help to be of any use to him," said Harvey.

"Never say die. Nil desperandum ! That has always been my motto," replied Jack.

"A jolly good one, too. Hurrah for a light heart !"

"And a true, honest mind," put in Jack.

"You're not worth much without it," Harvey answered.

While they were talking, Jack had been hard at work at the rope.

He speedily cut it through.

"Stand by !" he cried.

Harvey held out his arms and caught the body of Rook as, by the loosening of the rope, it descended to the ground.

He laid it down on a soft, mossy bank, on which wild flowers and ferns grew.

Harkaway, knife in hand, was by his side in a moment.

The rope was removed from his neck, his collar torn open, his arms and legs unbound.

Rook began to breathe again, and the black blood went from his face.

Still there was a dangerous look about him.

"He hasn't been strung up long, poor beggar," said Jack.

"It is lucky we came along," replied Harvey.

"The thing's a mystery to me," continued Jack. "The dangers must have bested him and Tinker in some way."

"What's this on his vest? "

Harvey pointed to the placard.

Up to now it had escaped their notice.

They read it attentively, and their faces soon expressed the surprise and mortification they felt.

"A new danger has sprung up for me—for all of us," said Harkaway.

"I have heard of this wife of Morgan's," observed Harvey. "She's a perfect terror. They call her Fighting Sue, the demon of the woods."

"And now she is Queen of the Bushrangers. It is a bad lookout for us. She will attack the settlement. We can't think of leaving Australian soil yet awhile."

"No," replied Harvey; "that's like our luck. We must settle accounts with Mrs. Morgan."

"She is after revenge, because I was the cause of her husband's death."

"There can be no doubt of that. I say, will this man recover? I like him too well to think of losing him."

"He's all right; I can tell by the strengthening of the respiration."

"Glad to hear it. Give him a drop of brandy out of your flask."

Jack did so, and Rook gazed at them with signs of returning consciousness.

"When he was able to move, they got him on his feet, and walked him up and down.

This restored the circulation to its normal condition.

In about an hour he was himself again.

He shook hands with his rescuers, thanked them for their services, and related his adventures.

Harkaway and Harvey saw that there was trouble ahead of them, if this new band of rangers was not speedily stamped out.

"I rejoice to know that you have been brought back from the grave, as it were," said Jack. "I was going with Harvey to Masdon, but will see you back to the settlement."

"Never mind me, sir," replied Rook. "You are too kind. I can get round by myself."

"Are you sure you are strong enough? "

"Quite. There is no danger. The rangers will lie low for a time, and then Fighting Sue will go for you."

"For me—yes."

"You know it. You feel it as I do. Beware of her. She wants revenge."

"Right again—for her husband's death, of which she thinks me the sole cause."

"Precisely. And I don't think that woman, Mr. Harkaway, will ever rest contented until you have had her hanged, or she has settled you."

"That is just my opinion, Rook," said Harkaway; "and if you will walk back to the settlement, Harvey and I will proceed and acquaint the sheriff with what has happened, tell him of this new pest to Colonial up-country people, and ask him to drop down on it quickly."

"It is his place to do it."

"Why does he get his position and pay if not to protect the citizens?" continued Jack.

They parted.

Rook went to the settlement.

He felt rather dizzy and sore round the throat, but he had not been hanging long enough to hurt much.

Harkaway and Harvey continued their journey to Masdon, and was fortunate enough to find Sheriff Hard-rock at home.

This functionary, who thought rather more of himself than other people did, was indulging in an early twelve-o'clock dinner.

They had met before, so that there was no need of any introduction.

"Glad to see you," he exclaimed, as the help ushered them in. "Sit down and join me. It's only roast sheep meat. I'd ha' killed a couple of fowls had I known you were coming."

"Thank you all the same," replied Jack, "we'll dine later at the inn. Not hungry yet. You peg away, and listen to what we have come to tell you."

"Wire in," said the sheriff.

Harkaway clearly and succinctly related all the recent occurrences.

He wound up with a description of Fighting Sue's position and band, her intentions towards him, and the way in which she had treated Rook.

"It is a very daring set-out," exclaimed the sheriff, "but only what we are accustomed to in these parts."

"What do you intend to do about it?" asked Harkaway.

"Nothing at present."

"Won't you rid the country of these plagues?"

"I have my hands full just now, Mr. Harkaway. For fully a month, or more, I can not attend to Mrs. Morgan's gang," replied Hardrock.

Jack was astonished and annoyed.

"How is that, may I inquire? The settlers ought to be protected," he said.

"I am doing my best for their welfare. I must hunt down and bring to justice some sheep-stealers."

"Well, when can we expect you to move in the matter?"

"As soon as I can."

"That is very vague."

"I can give you nothing more definite. In addition to the sheep-stealers, I have to look out for a London swindler."

"Who is that?"

"The police at Melbourne have wired me that a notorious rascal is coming here to work the neighbourhood. Sometimes he calls himself a lord, at others a baronet, or a captain in the army."

"Never mind him," cried Jack, impatiently. "The rangers have got our boy Tinker. I want him back. They——"

"It's no good, sir," interrupted Hardrock. "I can't help you for a month at least. Please excuse me. I must be off."

The sheriff rose.

This was a signal for his visitors to depart.

They did so, deeply disappointed.

If anything was to be done with the new Morgan gang, they would have to do it themselves.

Harkaway and Harvey went to the inn, where they had some dinner.

Having refreshed themselves, they returned to the settlement.

Jack was unusually grave and serious.

There was more hard work and danger in store for him.

He was well aware that young Jack would not leave the up-country station until he had rescued his boy Tinker from the clutches of Fighting Sue, the Queen of the Bushrangers.

Action of some sort must be decided upon.

He could expect no help from Hardrock.

In his opinion, the rangers were more formidable, more daring and to be dreaded than they ever had been.

CHAPTER XLII.

MR. MOLE MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A NOBLEMAN, AND BRINGS HIM TO HARKAWAYVILLE, ONLY TO FIND OUT THAT ALL IS NOT GOLD THAT GLITTERS.

As Harkaway had anticipated, young Jack entreated him not to leave the Australian continent without rescuing his boy Tinker from the new band of bushrangers.

He had taken a great fancy to Tinker.

It seemed cowardly in the extreme to abandon him to his fate.

Rook was of the same mind.

Anxious though he was to return to the Old Country, Harkaway yielded to his son's wishes.

It was settled that the bushrangers should be attacked, but they were a formidable band.

Time was required for the organisation of an expedition.

The people in the settlement did not care about Tinker, and relied, for their defence against Fighting Sue and her men, upon the sheriff of the county.

Therefore, Harkaway had to depend upon his own particular friends and followers.

He summoned them all to his house, and everyone obeyed the call, except Mr. Mole.

These were Harvey, Rook, young Jack, Harry Girdwood, Monday and Sunday.

"This is a council of war," exclaimed Harkaway. "The bushrangers have sprung into existence again, and we shall have to do our work a second time."

"If it was not for Tinker, we could go home, father," replied young Jack.

"I have promised you that we will rescue him, but we are not strong enough to cope with them at present. We must beat up for recruits. The settlers do not care to

fight, although they ought to do so to protect themselves. At any moment they may be raided on and plundered."

"Offer a sum of money for volunteers, father."

"I will do so," said Harkaway. "I should think half-a-dozen more will be sufficient to assist us."

"If they are sturdy, reliable fellows," put in Rook. "Yet I do not think we shall get our volunteers here. They are intent on the business of cultivating land and raising sheep."

"That is so. They will defend themselves, but fighting is not in their line. However, I shall try to raise a small force, and until I can do so, we must wait," replied Harkaway.

The council broke up.

Young Jack, Harry Girdwood, and Monday walked out together.

They sat down on a piece of land in front of Mr. Mole's house, which was not far off.

"This am a bad bit of business about poor Tinker," exclaimed Monday. "What am we going to do?"

"I sha'n't wait for the governor to raise his force," replied young Jack. "If you and Harry will join me, I will rescue him in a day or two."

"I'm with you," said Harry.

"Count me in, you bet," cried Monday. "We'll set fire to the bush, and burn the ole woman and her band up."

"That's not a bad suggestion; there's a lot in it," exclaimed Jack, admiringly.

"It am a stroke of genius," replied Monday, with a self-complacent smile.

"There can be no doubt of that, since you say so. Are you often like it?"

"I's taken that way sometimes. My head is not so thick as it looks, sar."

"You heard Rook tell us the direction in which we must go to find the rangers' camp?" continued Jack.

"Yes, sar. Reach the road to Masdon, and come to the tree scathed by lightning; then go into the bush by um south-west quarter of um compass."

"That is correct. Now, we must wait in the bush until the wind is blowing towards the rangers, and then set fire to the bush. What do you think of the plan, Harry?"

"I call it a thundering good scheme, so far as the

rangers are concerned ; but you have forgotten one thing," rejoined Girdwood.

"What's that?"

"If you burn them up or drive them to flight, the same thing will happen to Tinker, who will share the fate of his captors, whatever that may be."

Jack and Monday looked blankly at one another.

The circumstance that Girdwood reminded them of was one they had entirely overlooked.

"Ha, ha!" laughed young Jack. "You're such a deuced clever fellow, aren't you, Monday?"

The Prince of Limbi was not at all disconcerted.

He pointed his finger at young Jack.

"There's two of us," he retorted. "Yah, yah!"

"He's got you there," remarked Harry.

"I suppose I must admit that I jumped too readily to conclusions," said Jack.

"If Tinker, as Rook describes it, has a log of wood fastened by a chain to his leg, he can't run very fast. Um fire get him first," observed Monday.

"So we are as far off rescuing him as ever."

"That's so, Mast' Jack."

"If I wait for father to get a force together, or for the sheriff's *posse*, I may wait a month," cried Jack, impatiently.

"Don't wait—act," replied Harry.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Monday. "Bravo! Three cheers! Hurrah!"

"Yes," added Jack, "we three will attack Fighting Sue and her men, and give the bushrangers all they require in the way of lead pills."

A voice behind them was heard.

"Well said!" it exclaimed. "But you shall not go alone ; there shall be four of us, and they shall hark to the roar of us. We'll give them fits."

They turned round, and beheld Mr. Mole.

By his side was a stout, well-dressed, rather aristocratic-looking stranger.

His diamond scarf-pin was large, his rings numerous, and his watch-chain massive.

They had just got out of a dog-cart, in which they had driven from Masdon, to which place the professor had been on a visit for a day or two.

He had some friends in the town, with whom he did business in gold.

For some time past, Mr. Mole had been buying up nuggets.

These he kept in a large box in his house, intending to take them to England.

In the Old Country he hoped to dispose of them at a profit.

At the time we are speaking of, he had over a thousand pounds' worth of lumps of virgin gold in his box.

There was a placid smile on the old gentleman's face.

It proclaimed almost audibly that he was on excellent terms with himself.

"Two of my pupils, my lord!" he exclaimed. "The coloured person is their attendant."

This remark was addressed to his companion.

"Ah! indeed. Very glad to make their acquaintance, I'm sure," was the reply. "What names did you say?"

"I will with your permission, introduce them."

"Why don't you ask ours?" inquired young Jack.

"Is it not an honour, my dear boy, to be presented to a lord?"

"I don't know so much about that."

"Hush! Harkaway and Girdwood—Lord Bankside. His lordship and I met on the road between here and Masdon. He was coming to our settlement to buy land, for he had heard much of the excellent prospects of Harkawayville as a regular growing, go-ahead, take-the-cake sort of place. Lord Bankside has kindly consented to honour my poor house with his presence for a few days."

Jack and Harry bowed stiffly.

Lord Bankside smiled, and said he was glad to know them, adding that, from what he had seen of the settlement, he knew he should like it very much.

"Now, my lord," continued Mole, "I will take you round, and make you acquainted with our principal citizens."

"I am rather tired," replied his lordship. "Cannot you defer it until to-morrow?"

"As you please. We will have a walk instead, and then some refreshment in my house. I have some particularly old brandy, which I can recommend."

They walked away together, Mole being as proud as a peacock of his new friend.

A lord had never before been seen so far up country, and was a decided novelty.

"What do you think of Mole's friend?" asked Jack.

"I don't like him," replied Harry; "he does not look like the genuine article."

"Wouldn't care about meeting him on a dark night in um lonely road," said Monday.

"You're right. He's got a sort of stand-and-deliver air. I shall steer clear of him," continued Jack.

"When do you intend to start after Tinker?" inquired Harry.

"To-morrow morning. Keep it dark."

"Is the governor to know of it?"

"Certainly not; he'd crab it. If he told me not to go, I should have to abandon the job, because I never fly in the face of his authority and disobey him; but if he knows nothing about my intention, I shall be all right," replied Jack.

"Shall you let Mole come?"

"He's no good in the bush with his wooden legs. He can fire a gun, but he'd be more trouble than he's worth."

"That's what I was thinking," said Harry.

"Perhaps he'll let out what he has heard, and give us away."

"Not he. I can see that he is too full of his nobleman, and, after their walk, Mole will get as tight as a drum. I know him. Suppose we clean our rifles and pistols, and fill our knapsacks with provisions, and our kegs with water?"

"That is well thought of."

They separated to do as Jack suggested, and had only just left the spot, when Mr. Mole and Lord Bankside returned to the house.

Half-a-dozen people whom they met had been made known to his lordship, and the news of his arrival was flashed like wildfire through the settlement.

"I flatter myself you have created a sensation," remarked Mole, as he noticed the inhabitants come out of their houses, and look curiously at them.

"A man of my rank must expect to be stared at," replied the nobleman. "It was just the same in Melbourne. I

was fêted and invited every where. One night at the Governor-General's, the next with the Mayor, another time at a leading merchant's. I thought the ladies would devour me. My title is a confounded nuisance. I've a good mind to drop it."

Mr. Mole led the way into the house, conducting his distinguished guest into his private room. Here he produced a bottle of brandy, glasses and mineral waters, as well as cigars.

After a couple of drinks, he became confidential, and, opening his gold-box, displayed his nuggets.

"You are a rich man, I suppose?" said the nobleman.

"No, my lord," replied Mole. "I have a moderate income, that is all."

"When do you and your party intend to return to England?"

"Not for some time, I am sorry to say. Our going away is delayed."

"How is that?"

"A new band of bushrangers has suddenly sprung into existence. They were totally unexpected. We thought we had destroyed the pests when we killed Morgan; but his wife has taken to the bush, with, I hear, ten followers."

"Not many, yet quite enough to be troublesome," remarked Lord Bankside.

"The queen, who is nicknamed Fighting Sue, has vowed vengeance against us, especially our leader, Harkaway," said Mole.

"Why don't you leave them to be dealt with by the lawful authorities?"

"The sheriff of the county won't move in the matter at present; he is after sheep-stealers, and some swindler who is expected here from Melbourne."

His lordship started visibly and turned pale.

This, however, was not noticed by Mole.

He was pouring himself out a third tumbler of brandy and water.

"Do you get many bad characters in these parts?" asked his lordship.

"A few; but we soon drive them out," was the reply.

"What becomes of them?"

"Oh, they either go to jail or join the bushrangers."

"If I were you or Harkaway, I should leave those gentry alone."

"We would gladly fold up our tents, as it were, and depart in peace," said Mole; "but, unfortunately, they have captured and hold prisoner a black boy of ours."

"Only a native?"

"He is a great favourite of young Jack Harkaway, and so scrupulous is the father's sense of honour, that he will not leave him behind."

"Then you will have to fight again?"

"No help for it," Mole answered. "Battered as I am, and deprived of my legs, I rather like it."

"How did you lose your lower limbs?"

"In action, my lord," said Mole, proudly. "I have fought savages and pirates, on land and sea."

"How brave you must be."

"Ah! I shudder sometimes when I think of the number of men I have killed—hundreds, my lord."

"You would have been a general if you had been in the army, and have had medals and crosses."

"Some day I shall write my life. That will make me famous all over the world."

"I wish you would dedicate the work to me," exclaimed Lord Bankside.

"Thanks, my lord; I will do so with pleasure. Your condescension is most gracious," replied Mole.

He was highly delighted at the compliment.

The afternoon passed very agreeably in conversation.

Mole invited Harkaway and Harvey to dinner, and Lord Bankside took great pains to please.

He was voted a good fellow, all being pleased to have met him.

The company separated at a late hour. Mole conducted his lordship to his room, wished him good-night, and, taking a stiff glass for the last, the worthy professor sought his own bed, being soon in the land of dreams.

It was nine o'clock when he awoke.

Hastily dressing himself, he proceeded to his lordship's room to call him to breakfast.

To his surprise, the door was open.

This was not very extraordinary, for Lord Bankside might have risen early, and gone for a walk.

But Mole's countenance fell when he noticed that the bed had not been slept in.

What could it mean?

Had he been deceived in the real character of his English nobleman?

"Perish the thought," he said to himself.

After making such a fuss over Lord Bankside, he would be the laughing-stock of the town.

Every body would make fun of him.

Especially would this be the case with Harkaway.

He went down stairs in no easy or enviable state of mind.

At the front door he encountered Harkaway.

"Good-morning, sir," he exclaimed. "Whose soap have you used?"

"The same as usual," replied Mole. "Why do you ask?"

"You look rather black."

"I—the fact is, I'm a trifle upset."

"Indeed! How is the newly-imported, gilt-edged peer, with whom we had the distinguished honour of dining last evening, and whose tales of upper-crust society are still ringing in my ears?"

"I haven't seen his lordship yet."

"He lies late—quality hours."

"It isn't that," said Mole, in perplexity. "I saw him to his room last night."

"Well?" ejaculated Harkaway.

"Lo and behold! this morning he is not there."

"Gone for a walk, perhaps,"

"The bed has not been slept in."

Harkaway indulged in a prolonged whistle.

Whe—ew!

"That looks dickey," he exclaimed. "There is some thing quizby, as they say, about it. He may have landed you in Queer Street."

"Oh, no," Mole answered; "too much the gentleman. No danger about that."

"But where is he?"

"That is precisely what I want to know."

"Gone where the woodbine twineth, I'll bet you a dollar."

"Oh, he'll be back directly."

Mole said this, trying to comfort himself.

"Where did you pick the fellow up? or, where did he pick you up?" Harkaway enquired.

"It was an accidental meeting, between here and Masdon, on the road."

"Who spoke first?"

"He did, asking the way to Harkawayville. I was driving and offered him a lift."

"Rash—very rash."

"He had a flask of Scotch—special, you know; so had I."

"You always have."

"We exchanged drinks," continued Mole.

"And confidences?"

"Exactly. I told him all about you and myself. He, in return, told me who he was."

"And you believed him?"

"Most implicitly. Wouldn't you have done the same thing?" asked the puzzled professor.

"Not much. Have you looked at your money-box, treasure-chest, or whatever you call it."

"Not since yesterday, in the afternoon; I showed his lordship the nuggets."

Harkaway put his hand on Mole's shoulder.

He looked intently in his eyes.

"Isaac Mole," he said, "when were you born?"

"Let me think," replied the professor. "In the year——"

"Never mind. Will you ever learn any thing?"

"I can speak five languages."

"You're a mug," exclaimed Harkaway, "and I tell you so to your face."

Mr. Mole pushed him away.

"This language, my dear boy—for such you will always be to me—is both vulgar and undeserved," he said.

"Come and look at your money-box," replied Harkaway.

"By all means; but to suspect Lord Bankside——"

"Call him Lord Humbug."

"I will not hear one word against a witty, polished, and accomplished nobleman."

"You are responsible for him."

"I fully accept the responsibility. Bankside is a Norman title. It was created by the Conqueror."

"Who told you so?"

"I had it from his own lips."

"Gospel truth, I expect," said Harkaway.

"Of course. Who can doubt it? Thirty thousand a year, a castle, two baronial halls——"

"Drop it."

"My dear fellow, I can only call you an unbelieving pagan," cried Mole, angrily.

"Keep your temper."

"I can't; you are so awfully aggravating."

"Look at your nuggets."

Mr. Mole, in high dudgeon, led the way to his private room.

The box was unlocked.

He had closed it on the previous day, but forgotten to turn the key.

Kneeling down, he threw up the lid.

There, to all outward appearance, was the glittering nuggets piled up to the top of the chest.

With the greediness of a miser, Mole gloated over his treasure.

His mouth expanded with a satisfied triumphant smile.

His eyes spoke volumes of contentment.

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed.

"It looks all right," said Harkaway "but——"

He broke off abruptly.

"What now, sceptic?"

"Look at this."

Harkaway stooped down and picked up a piece of some shining stuff which was lying on the floor.

Mr. Mole rose and also looked at it.

"Why," he cried, "it looks like—yes, it is—gold leaf."

"Exactly; the thing that carvers and gilders use in their trade."

"The very same. But what of it? Nothing! You can't make any thing of that."

"Wait a bit."

"I tell you Lord Bankside is above suspicion. Let us to breakfast. What time is it?"

He felt in his pocket for his watch.

It was a valuable one he had bought in Melbourne.

That and the chain had cost seventy-five sovereigns.

The watch and chain were both gone.

"Jumping Moses!" exclaimed he, "the—the clock's gone!"

"Did you have it last night?" asked Jack.

"Wound it up before I went to bed."

"Lock your door?"

"No, left it open, because of the heat."

"Coat and vest on the back of a chair?"

"No, on the end of the bed."

"Humph! Fine fellow, Lord Bankside," said Harkaway, with a chuckle.

"Don't chaff," replied Mole, testily. "Leave off your infernal fooling."

"Came in with the Conqueror?"

"So he did. I defy you to disprove it."

"I've been looking at a peerage, and there's no such title in it."

"*What!*"

Mr. Mole's face became as long as a farthing kite.

"Fact. You are done brown! Sold for old junk! Skinned! Had for a jay!"

"Do-n't tell me that," stammered Mole.

"It is as plain as a pikestaff, or the sun at noonday."

"But the nuggets?"

"Hold on a bit."

As he spoke, Harkaway bent down, and, taking up one of the nuggets, rubbed it against his sleeve.

A lot of gold leaf rolled off.

The hard surface of a stone—a common stone, was revealed.

He plunged his hand in, lower down, and found nothing but stones of various sizes. These were not gilded.

It was only a few on the surface that had been treated to the luxury of gold leaf, put on with some adhesive substance.

This was either size or paste.

Mole threw up his arms.

"Oh, my nuggets!" he screamed, in a broken voice.

"Swindled, and by a nobleman!"

He would stick to it, that his friend was a lord.

"A common thief," replied Harkaway.

"Sad that it should be so. I can ill afford it. My gold gone, my watch vanished."

"He must have mesmerised you."

"Quite a gentleman, wasn't he?"

"Spare me. Don't rub it in."

"Be generous."

As he spoke, Mole sank down on the top of the stones, leaning against the lid of the box.

He was exhausted by grief, vexation, and emotion.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Harkaway. "It's not a bad joke."

"If you don't get out, I'll—I'll chuck stones at you," threatened Mole.

"Nuggets, you mean—gilt ones."

"Be off out of my sight. Do, for Heaven's sake, give me a rest."

Harkaway walked to the door.

When he got to the step, he saw young Jack running up, followed by a small crowd of people.

"I say, dad," he cried, "here's a go."

"What's up, young one?" Harkaway asked.

"Miles, the saddler, has had his horse and trap stolen in the night."

"Any more of it?"

"The bank's been robbed, and all the cash is gone."

"Is that the lot?"

"All I've heard of at present. Folks want to see that English lord of Mole's."

"They'll have to take it out in wanting."

"I thought so; has he——"

"Bolted?" interrupted Harkaway. "That's it exactly; collared Mole's watch and his nuggets."

"Oh, crumbs!" said young Jack, nearly choking. "What price, noblemen?"

"Quote them at a discount," replied a melancholy voice at his elbow.

It was Professor Mole.

He looked like a ghost who had been writing some cheerful sort of literature, such as "Letters from Hades."

Young Jack roared with laughter.

A crowd soon collected round the door.

The matter was explained to them by Harkaway.

It was clear to all that Mole had been imposed upon by a clever swindler, who had utilised the night for the purposes of robbing.

From the bank he had taken five hundred pounds.

In the horse and trap he had stolen he had decamped with his spoil to parts unknown.

Derisive shouts rang in Mole's ears.

He was the victim of well-deserved ridicule.

Sadly he turned to Harkaway.

"Tell me in mournful numbers that life is but an empty dream," he said.

"And all is not gold that glitters," answered Harkaway, slyly, thinking of the nuggets.

Mole shut his door and disappeared.

The crowd dispersed.

Harkaway and his son walked away together, greatly amused at the adventure.

It would be a standing joke against the professor as long as he lived.

What had become of the false lord, nobody could tell.

A messenger, however, was despatched on a fleet horse to Masdon, to inform Sheriff Hardrock of what had taken place.

It was hoped that the plausible villain would be captured.

But the country was so vast and so sparsely settled that he had a good chance of escape.

The night passed without any thing occurring.

Early in the morning, young Jack, Harry Girdwood, and Monday secretly left the settlement.

Young Jack left a letter for his father, informing him that they intended to plunge into the bush, and rescue Tinker at all hazards.

CHAPTER XLIII.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE BUSH—LORD BANKSIDE MEETS WITH OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

WHEN he quitted the flourishing town of Harkawayville with the booty he had appropriated at the expense of Mr. Mole, the bank, and others, the self-termed Lork Bankside drove rapidly away in the stolen trap.

He took the direction of the bush.

Here he knew he would be safe for a time ; but, in any

inhabited place, his capture would only be a question of time.

Lord Bankside was an assumed name.

The fellow who personated the English nobleman, and had deceived many persons, was, in reality, a convict—Ted Hammond.

He was born in London, had been a gentleman's servant, in which capacity he committed a daring robbery upon his employer.

For this offence he was transported for life, but, managing to escape, he commenced to depredate in Australia.

Ted Hammond became a notorious criminal, and was known under various aliases.

Up to the present time he had defied all efforts to capture him.

Sometimes he would be heard of in Sydney, or some part of New South Wales.

A few weeks afterwards, he would be operating in Melbourne or Adelaide.

Then he would go up country, and the bold rascal soon bestowed his patronage upon New Zealand.

Wherever he went, there was a tale to be told of fraud, robbery, and murder.

Wild as the bush was, he knew how to hide and exist in it for weeks at a time.

The authorities were straining every nerve to catch him, but Ted Hammond was determined to baffle them if he could.

When he struck into the main road, which, for some distance, ran alongside the bush region, it was broad daylight.

A rosy flush, which deepened into bands of gold, streaked the eastern horizon.

Already he had placed a dozen miles between Harkawayville and himself.

The rascal could not help chuckling when he thought of how cleverly and completely he had outwitted and taken in Professor Mole.

"I bluffed that old rooster, and no mistake!" he muttered. "He got the proper tip from me—ha, ha!"

He laughed till the adjacent overhanging gum trees echoed with his merriment.

Suddenly he pulled the reins and stopped short.

A dark lonely part of the road had been reached.

It was close to the spot where the attempt by the bush-rangers to lynch Rook had been made.

Ted Hammond, *alias* Lord Bankside, appeared to be familiar with the locality.

Stepping out of the trap, he took from it a sack which contained the gold and nuggets he had stolen.

He put this over his shoulder, and staggering under its weight, entered the bush.

Walking about half-a-mile, he came to a hollow tree, in which he deposited his treasure.

It fell to the bottom, and was securely hidden from prying eyes.

Having accomplished this task, he stooped down, and drank from a bubbling spring that came out of the earth at his feet.

Then, pushing aside some bushes, he disclosed a small hut, built of boughs and dry grass.

Entering this, he looked around. In a corner were some tins of meat and fish, two bottles of spirits, and a bag of flour, with a plate or two, and a cup.

"All as I left it," he said.

It was a hiding-place of his, and had proved a safe refuge when hotly chased.

He hastened back to the road; the horse was standing where he had left it.

Getting in, he drove a couple of miles up the road, stopping at a lonely tavern, which rejoiced in the title of "The Bully Boy."

The landlord, by name Garrat, was standing outside, with his hands in his pockets, whistling to some pigeons.

"Morning, stranger. Come far?" he asked.

"A tidy distance," replied Hammond, mentioning a place which was a long way off, and in a direction opposite to that from which he had started.

"What's your business?"

"I'm a woolstapler for this season. I have made all the purchases I want, and I'm going to Melbourne, where my warehouse is."

"You can take the cars at Masdon. I reckon that's your nearest point."

"So I was told. How far is that from this shanty?"

"I could walk it in an hour and a half," the landlord answered. "Call it five miles."

"What sort of a town is it?" inquired Hammond.

He pretended to be a stranger, though he knew the place well enough.

"You can't call it A 1, first-class, copper-bottomed," was the reply. "There is about as much money as there is enterprise there, and that's devilish little."

"That's bad to hear."

"Why so, stranger?"

"I had hoped to trade off this horse and trap to some advantage. You see, I am through my work, and have no more use for it. Do you twig?"

"It don't take me long to tumble. I'll trade with you, if I can," cried Garrat. "Don't open your mouth too wide. I'm a fair judge of a nag. What's your price?"

"For the lot, as it stands, harness thrown in, I'll take fifty pounds."

Garrat shook his head.

"That cat won't jump," he said. "It's too much by half."

"Go on. Man alive, where's your conscience? Why the horse is worth all the money. It's dirt cheap at the price. I'm giving it away, and robbing myself."

"That's what you say. Take thirty?"

"Is that the highest you will offer?"

"Can't spring a farthing more," replied the landlord.

"All right; you set up the drinks, and the turn-out's yours," said Hammond.

He got out, and secured the reins to the hitching-post.

He was about to follow the landlord to the bar (for, in those days, nothing could be done in Australia without a drink to bind the bargain and show good fellowship), when a diversion occurred.

A man rode clattering up on a powerful chestnut horse, and looked intently at Hammond.

He took a photograph from his pocket and gazed at that.

Evidently he was comparing the two forms and faces.

Hammond's hand sought the hip-pocket of his trousers.

This was a sure sign that his fingers were gripping the handle of a pistol.

"Take care, my man," cried the new-comer, imitating his example; "I am the sheriff of this county."

It was Hardrock himself.

"I don't care a bad farthing who you are," replied Hammond. "What right have you to interfere with me?"

"The right my position as representative of the law gives me."

"Explain yourself."

"I know you, Ted Hammond," was the ready rejoinder.

"You'll have to come with me."

"Shall I?" asked the ruffian, with sarcastic emphasis.

"Hold up your hands!"

This would be a token of surrender, indicating that he did not intend to shoot.

But the convict was not to be caught so easily.

He would rather have died than be sent to prison again.

He was a "lifer" or a "corpse," as the prisoners term it, and if relegated to jail, he would be so closely ironed and watched that he would stand no chance of escaping a second time.

"Surrender, and I'll treat you well," continued Hardrock.

"I'm dashed if I do," replied Hammond. "Draw on me, and you're a dead man."

"My duty is the first thing with me. Garrat, I call upon you to assist me in carrying out the law."

The landlord shrugged his shoulders.

He stood on the threshold of the door, out of the way.

Well he knew how bullets had a way of straying about, and hitting an innocent person.

"Leave me out, mister," he exclaimed. "I wasn't born for thief-catching. It's as much as I can do to catch a living out of the few customers that come this way."

"I'll be a mark on you if you don't help me."

"It will be my misfortune, and I'll have to put up with it."

Hammond laughed.

"You're fairly cornered, sheriff," he said. "If you don't ride off on other business, I'll get the drop on you, before you can move a finger, so help me."

"I'll not going to be beaten by you."

"If you want to see who's best man, we'll fight it out," cried Hammond.

"I'm ready," was the calm reply.

Quick as lightning the men drew their revolvers.

Ted Hammond had the advantage of being prepared, and had his weapon in the air three seconds before his opponent.

Three seconds only!

It's a very brief space, but of incalculable value to a man who is fighting a duel to the death.

There was a sharp report on the crisp morning air.

It was followed by another.

Then came a cry of pain from Hardrock and a hollow, sepulchral laugh from Hammond.

The latter was unhurt, but he had hit the sheriff in the shoulder.

Each pistol had seven chambers.

On being discharged, it follows that the men had twelve shots left to fire between them.

They wasted no time in the deadly game.

Hardrock fired first this time, and his bullet went so close to the desperado as to graze his ear.

The next minute Hammond's ball sank into his breast, and with a groan he fell off his horse, striking the ground heavily.

Thoroughly frightened, the animal rushed madly up the road, and leaping a fence, disappeared across a meadow.

Hammond repocketed his pistol. Garrat walked up to the sheriff, and lifted his head.

"I'm dying!" murmured Hardrock, as the blood trickled from his lips.

"It's a pity, but I couldn't stop it," exclaimed Garrat.

Folding his arms, Hammond looked sternly and un pityingly at his victim.

"He would have it," he remarked. "Why didn't he leave me alone? If he'd walked on, winking the other eye, do you think I should have touched him?"

"I know thundering well you wouldn't. He's at his last gasp. What'll I do?"

"Draw him up against the wall, and put a log under his head for a pillow. You can't do more."

"It's bad to leave him like this, till it's all over," said the landlord of the "Bully Boy," in a deprecating tone.

"You are a soft," replied Hammond, with a cold-

blooded smile. "I sha'n't waste any sympathy over him. He would have shot me if he could have aimed straight enough. Let's liquor up."

Garrat made no further remonstrance, nor did he hesitate.

Drawing the sheriff up against the wall of his house, he put a clump of wood under his head.

With a curt "Wish you luck, old son," he followed the convict, who marched behind the bar, and coolly helped himself to his favourite brand of whisky.

"Join me?" the latter asked.

"I'm not taking any," replied Garrat. "It's made me feel queer."

"Good-day. I'm off," said Hammond. "You can tell the folks that I've gone to the Parramatta River, and sha'n't be seen in these parts again for some time."

"All right. Did you know Sue Morgan?—Fighting Sue, they call her."

"What! the bushranger's wife?"

"That's the one. Morgan's dead, you know, but Sue's up in the bush close by with Morgan's brother Bob, and a gang of nine."

"You don't say it!"

As he spoke, astonishment was plainly visible on his face.

"I don't blame you, sonny, for fighting for your liberty. Hardrock would have shown you no mercy. Take another drink," continued Garrat.

They both helped themselves.

"I knew Morgan, his wife, and several of his men," remarked the convict, "and I fancy I've seen your face somewhere."

"Yours is familiar to me. Where have we met?"

"I've been in trouble."

"You?"

"Yes. I was put away for horse-stealing. I did time before I came out here."

"That's it. We must have met in chokey."

"I don't mind telling you. It was a five stretch. Oh, yes, I've had the steel. The key's been turned on me."

"So you can feel for a chap when he's hard pressed?"

"You bet," replied Garrat. "I wasn't going to lend Hardrock a helping hand to lag a pal."

"Thank you."

"There will be a devil of a stir about this affair."

"I know there will, worse luck."

"If you take my tip, you'll make for the bush, and join the rangers for a time."

"Where are they?"

"Their camp is about ten miles due south from here. They are customers of mine. Bob Morgan was here last night, with Cross-eyed Mike. Ever met him?"

"Well, I should smile. He helped me to escape, just before his time was up."

"What may your name be?" asked Garrat.

"Ted Hammond."

"By thunder! is that so? Why, you've the biggest record in the Colony."

"What do you think?" replied Hammond, smiling again.

As is the case with great criminals, his moral sense was blunted, and he was proud of his offences.

The villain had broken every law in the Decalogue, and gloried in it.

After a third drink—his capacity for whisky was unlimited—he separated from Garrat, and, retracing his steps, entered the bush, his intention being to join the rangers, and seek shelter with them.

There is a communion amongst criminals, and he was confident that Mrs. Morgan and her men would receive him with open arms.

Being in want of sleep, he went to his hiding-place, where he had hidden his booty in the hollow tree, and, reaching his hut, made a breakfast and laid down.

In a few minutes, he was in a sound slumber. The murder of Hardrock did not appear to disturb his mind in the slightest degree.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE RESCUE PARTY AND THE SEARCH FOR TINKER.

TED HAMMOND had not been asleep in his hut more than a couple of hours, before young Jack, Harry Girdwood, and Monday walked into the bush at the same point that he did.

They looked well and fit—in fact, they were in form to do any thing, and go any where.

Their knapsacks were well filled with food, and their canteens with fresh water.

Each had a cartridge belt, containing thirty rounds for their breech-loading rifles. Their revolvers and knives were stuck in their belts.

Monday soon began to hunt about like a dog.

His back was bent, his head lowered, and he carefully scrutinised the grass, and the twigs on the bushes.

"What's he up to?" asked Harry.

"Don't you see?—he's hunting. That's his way—looking for tracks, you know," Jack answered.

"Oh, that's his game! Will he find any thing?"

"Leave him alone for that."

Suddenly Monday sat down on the ground, and burst out laughing.

"What's the matter with you, old Ivory?" inquired Jack.

"Yah! yah!" replied Monday.

"You've gone off that onion of yours, haven't you?"

"Not muchly, Mast' Jack. Um think um in Limbi again."

"Have you found the scent?"

"For certain. The pusson I's following don't know how to cover up um tracks."

"Is there only one?"

"Ain't that nuff to begin with? P'raps lead to the whole shoot of the rangers."

"That's very likely. Are the tracks fresh?"

"All in the morning dew. Hold um rifles tight. This child will go first."

"As you are experienced, we will leave the management of the campaign to you," said young Jack.

"Your father open um eyes when we bag the lot, and get that boy Tinker."

"I should like to have the credit of it."

"So you shall, sar. Say you did it all. Old Ebony do nothing."

"Oh, I won't be so mean as that."

"Come on, sar. Quick march. I's got um now."

So saying, Monday started on the trail he had discovered, at a rapid pace.

That is to say, it was rapid, taking into consideration the difficulties of the ground that had to be encountered, and the necessity for faithfully and unerringly pursuing the track.

But this seemed as easy as child's-play to the Limbian, when he had once struck it.

Young Jack and Harry followed in his footsteps.

For an hour they worked their weary way through the apparently interminable bush. Then Monday halted, and held up his hand.

"Here we have the old fox," he whispered. "This um den."

"Can we help?" asked Jack.

"No. Stand by to fire, if necessary. You pretty good shots. Don't hit um Monday."

"If we do, we'll hit you in a soft place, where it won't hurt much."

"You nice little joker. What price you?"

"More than you can afford."

"Shut up um mouth, the show going to begin. You hear music by the band soon."

Monday, as he spoke, opened his capacious mouth, and grinned.

The boys presented their rifles at nothing in particular. At present they could not see any thing.

Nevertheless, it was an exciting moment.

Monday had fallen on his hands and knees.

He was slowly crawling towards a roughly-made hut, consisting of boughs, stakes, and grass.

Pausing at the entrance, which was little more than a hole, he peered in.

He had laid his rifle down, as it would have been of

no use to him at close quarters. But he was amply protected.

Between his teeth was his sharp, Malay creese, which he had always retained.

In his belt was his pistol, which he could seize in an instant.

Suddenly he darted forward.

There was a sleeping man stretched on the mossy sward inside the hut.

Throwing himself upon him, Monday grasped him by the throat, and pointed his knife at his heart.

"You move, and you's a dead 'un," said Monday.

The man stared at him, but did not attempt to resist.

"Come on, Mast' Jack," cried Monday. "You's got bit ob cord in your pocket."

Jack was quickly by his side.

He comprehended the situation in a moment.

Producing a piece of hobbling cord, he secured the man's arms at the wrists.

Monday first disarmed, and then dragged him out of the dark hut into the glaring sunshine.

Directly his face was visible, a cry of astonishment broke from the three.

"Golly ! it am Lord Bankside," said Monday.

He was right.

They had captured the infamous Ted Hammond.

Little did he think that he would be so soon tracked and trapped.

It was extremely mortifying.

He had not had time to fire a shot in self-defence.

Naturally, he supposed that his captors had heard of the murder of the sheriff.

If not, they would hold him for the robbery he had done at Harkawayville.

"Your lordship left us rather unceremoniously," remarked young Jack.

"The game's up," replied Hammond. "Don't chaff."

"What are you doing here?"

"I'll make a clean breast of it. My intention was to join the rangers."

"Where are Mr. Mole's nuggets and the money you took from the bank?" continued young Jack.

"If I tell you, will you let me go free?"

There was a supplicating look on the murderer's face. As yet, it must be recollected that young Jack and his companions knew nothing of the murder of the sheriff.

If they had done so, they would not have been likely to make any terms with him.

"Look here!" exclaimed Jack. "Do you know where the bushrangers are?"

"I can find them," was the answer.

"How long will it take you to do so?"

"About two hours."

"If you will conduct us to their camp at evening, leave us in ambush, and, when they are asleep, steal their rifles and pistols, and bring them to us, you shall be at liberty to go where you like, and nothing shall be said."

Hammond looked grave.

"That's a large order, mister," he observed.

"It's a generous offer—take it or leave it," said Jack.

Some hesitation was apparent in Hammond's manner.

First of all, it was an act of treachery to old friends.

There is a rough kind of honour among thieves.

Secondly, to rob nine or ten men of their arms, even when they are sleeping, was a dangerous task.

But his liberty—his life was at stake.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed.

The bushrangers and their queen were to be betrayed.

Young Jack could scarcely conceal his satisfaction.

He was on the high-road to the rescue of Tinker.

For the best part of the day they remained where they were, comforting themselves with Hammond's stores and whisky.

Towards nightfall they started to hunt up the bushrangers.

It was an adventure full of peril.

On that very account young Jack delighted to engage in it.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BUSHRANGERS ARE BETRAYED.

WHEN night fell, and the sky was studded with stars, prominent among which was the Southern Cross, young Jack thought it was time to be moving.

He roused Monday and Harry, who were dozing.

"Time's up," he said.

They immediately sprang to their feet, and brought Ted Hammond out of the hut.

The rope that bound his arms was cut.

"I'm ready, master," he exclaimed.

"You know what you have to do?" said young Jack.

"Perfectly well. The price of my life and liberty is to betray the bushrangers. I'll do it."

"If you try to play me false, I will shoot you like a dog."

"There's no necessity for that, squire. I'll keep to my bargain."

"Do so, and all will be well," replied Jack.

The convict started in the direction pointed out by Garrat, the landlord of the "Bully Boy."

This was the only clew he had to the camp of the rangers.

At length they came to a path, that was pretty well defined by constant use.

"Here we are, boys," said Hammond. "I knew I should strike it."

"What you talking about?" asked Monday.

"Isn't this a regular trail? That's what I want to know."

"You can't most always generally tell," replied Monday.

"Get your hair cut," said Hammond. "I'm no slouch."

"Where does the path lead to?"

"Up to the rangers' camp, sonny."

Ted Hammond spoke at random.

As we have said, he had no positive and accurate

knowledge of the locality in which Fighting Sue and her band of desperadoes were established. Yet the path looked as if it was used by them.

No sooner had he seen it, than he determined to follow it up.

"Stand on one side!" said Monday. "I know more about this thing than you ever learnt."

"What's wrong now?" Hammond asked.

"It's a path," replied Monday, "and some body has been along it quite fresh."

They both looked down, and peered at the grass.

Feet had trodden it down within an hour or two.

"There's indication of that," observed Hammond.

"Can you make any thing pertickler out of um marks?" inquired Monday.

Ted Hammond looked carefully. He puzzled his brains; but could find out nothing.

"Mast' Jack," cried Monday, "this chap's an awful duffer; he not know any thing."

"Have you discovered any thing important?" asked Jack.

"Suppose um camp up there in um woods?"

He pointed to the heart of the bush.

"Yes, I understand."

"Well, two people's just come from camp, going towards the road, and they not come back again yet."

"Ah!" said Jack. "Two of the rangers may have gone to get supplies."

"May be hiding," Monday answered. "Look out you not get a bullet in um back."

"If I do, it can't be helped. Follow up the track. Quick march!"

"I'm on! What do you think?"

Monday followed Hammond closely.

He held his knife in his hand, resolved to stab him to the heart if he attempted any treachery.

Behind, with rifles, ready for use at a moment's notice, came young Jack and Harry.

The march continued for about an hour.

Suddenly Ted Hammond halted, and held up his hand.

A crescent moon had appeared in the heavens, and its light, added to that of the stars, made caution necessary.

The three behind him looked through the bush.

This was what they saw.

The bushrangers, who numbered nearly a dozen, were seated on the grass, or stretched out at full length.

Some were playing cards for money, others smoking and chatting.

A demijohn of whisky, flanked by a jar of pure spring water, was placed on a flat stone, which did duty as a table.

Daggersberg was perched, like a bird, on the stump of a tree, which had been broken off by the wind; he was playing a lively tune on an old violin.

Close by, a large wood fire was burning.

This was really wanted, as the nights were chilly, although the days were warm.

It was noticeable that neither Fighting Sue nor Tinker were to be seen.

At a sign from Ted Hammond the rescue party sank down on their knees.

Their rifles were pressed to their shoulders, ready for instant use.

The convict saw that each one was presented at him.

This indicated that if he did not keep his part of the compact, his life would be forfeited.

A fringe of bush completely hid young Jack and his companions from the rangers.

Daggersberg finished the tune he was playing, and his performance, somewhat crude though it was, received a hearty burst of applause.

A couple of mugs, made out of cows' horns, did duty for glasses, and were filled and emptied by the rangers, who, after walking to the jars to quench their thirst, resumed their former positions.

All at once, Ted Hammond stepped forward.

"Hullo! boys. What cheer?" he exclaimed.

The rangers sprang to their feet, rifle in hand, glaring fiercely at the intruder.

No one fired, however, because their leader, Bob Morgan, had not given them the order to do so.

The ruddy light of the fire flashed upon the convict's face, throwing its rugged outline into bold relief.

Morgan had been in close conversation with Morris; their countenances were at once illumined with a smile when they noticed Hammond.

They recognised him in a moment as an old friend and a desperado on whom they thought they could rely.

"It's Ted Hammond!" said Morgan. "I didn't know you were out."

"They couldn't keep me," was the reply.

"Bravo! You're too good a man to be under lock and key, wasting your blooming life in a prison."

"Am I welcome?"

"As the flowers in May, old pal. Sit down, and take a drink."

"Right! I want to change my breath. I'll have a smile with you, boys."

So saying, Hammond shook hands all round, and seated himself.

There was a sacrificial, hypocritical, Judas-like leer upon his face.

The bushrangers did not notice it, however.

They had not the slightest idea that they were in danger.

Ted Hammond was the last man in the world they would have suspected of plotting their betrayal.

"How did you hear of our camp and find us out?" asked Morris.

"Through little Joe Garrat, of the 'Bully Boy.' The old bounder and I have been acquainted for years."

"It's a wonder you didn't meet the queen and a native we've got as a servant?"

"Ain't seen nobody."

"They've gone to the 'Boy' to get some lush. Fighting Sue would go herself. She's got a will of her own, and likes prowling by night."

"Well, here's to the lady's health," said Hammond, raising the horn to his lips, and draining it dry.

Young Jack listened attentively to this conversation.

He learnt from it that the queen had gone on a foraging expedition, and taken the boy Tinker with her.

After he had disposed of the bushrangers, it would be necessary to look out for her and the boy.

She was sure to come back to the camp in a short time.

All had gone well so far.

He hoped to be back in Harkawayville before daylight with Tinker, and tell his father and the citizens in the settlement that he had destroyed the last of the bushrangers.

It would be an exploit to boast of.

Gradually the tobacco and whisky, of which they were partaking so freely, had their usual effect on the men.

They got drowsy, and fell off to sleep, one by one.

All except Ted Hammond.

He was on the alert, although he pretended to be as somnolent as the rest.

Daggersberg had put by the fiddle; the last song had been sung; whisky and the weed had lost their charms.

The solemn hush of the bush was only disturbed by the loud snoring of the drunken men.

All this time, young Jack, Harry, and Monday were kneeling behind the undergrowth and shrub.

It was a tiring and anxious period for them.

They kept their rifles pointed at Ted Hammond, and well he knew it.

The fire was burning low.

All the men were in a profound slumber.

He rose softly, and prepared for action.

There was no time to be lost.

Fighting Sue might return with Tinker at any moment, and it was best that the band should be dealt with before she arrived from her expedition to the "Bully Boy."

He went to the sleeping bushrangers, one by one, and without disturbing them, deprived them of their arms.

First he took the rifles, then the pistols, and finally the knives.

This rendered them as harmless as a four-thousand-year-old Egyptian mummy.

They were incapable of making any defence.

The convict conveyed the arms to young Jack.

"I've done the job, boss," he said, "same as I undertook to do."

"Are you sure you have not skipped one?" asked Jack.

"Certain sure, boss."

"Then your life is spared, but I warn you that it will be good for your health to get out of this locality."

"I mean to do so. The place is too poor for me."

"What do you mean?"

"There's no large money about. I want to make a big strike, and go to Europe."

"Will that benefit you?"

"There's money in the old countries," said the convict ;
"and, after all, civilisation is better than bush life."

"You like to sleep in a bed, with your boots off," Jack remarked.

"You bet. I'm sorry these chaps have got to go home, but it ain't my fault. Good-night, squire."

"Be off with you," replied Jack. "I'm only sorry that I can't include you in the death list."

"Don't say that, governor."

"I do, and I can't help it ; for a more thorough-paced, dastardly, despicable rascal I never met."

Ted Hammond retreated a few steps.

Suddenly he stooped down.

The arms he had so artfully stolen from the bushrangers were at his feet.

He bent down and snatched up a pistol.

"I'll pay you for that remark," he cried.

Before he could fire, Jack had his rifle levelled at him.

He pulled the trigger sharply.

There was a loud report, which raised a dozen echoes amongst the trees.

Ted Hammond uttered a groan, and fell forward on his face, mortally wounded.

The wretch had received his deserts at last.

No longer would he prey on the community, plundering and murdering.

The sound of the gun's explosion, as a matter of course, woke up the rangers.

They sprang to their feet in a hurry.

It was a night alarm.

Every one thought that the sheriff and his posse were upon them.

Dismay and fright were on each one's face.

The stars, the new moon, and the flickering embers of the dying fire enabled them to see one another.

Their enemies, however, were most effectually concealed from view.

"Quick!" exclaimed young Jack, who was perfectly cool and collected ; "mow them down."

"This child's on the job," replied Monday.

"I'll give them tarara-boom-de-ay," said Harry.

Two rifles were discharged, and two rangers fell.

Jack slipped a cartridge into the breech, and dropped another.

In vain the rangers looked for their weapons.

They could find nothing.

Shots came from the bushes in quick succession.

One by one the bushrangers fell.

Young Jack, Harry Girdwood, and Monday were dead shots.

They never missed their aim.

It was a wholesale slaughter.

All fell in agony, except Bob Morgan, who received a bullet in the arm, and fled into the bush.

"That's the lot," said young Jack, getting up.

"We've done the trick nicely," observed Harry.

"The skunk who betrayed them, and tried to shoot me, has also joined the majority," replied Jack.

"He lost his temper, which was the worst thing he could do, under the circumstances.

"Fellows like that are sure to come to grief, sooner or later."

"Honesty the best policy, sar," said Monday.

"That's so, old Ivory."

"Now we haven't got Tinker," exclaimed Jack.

"Keep a good lookout for him."

"Fighting Sue's at large, but she'll come along presently with Tinker."

"Have to shoot her, too, sar."

"She's as great a criminal as the men, and though she is a woman, I don't see why we should show her any more mercy than we have the men."

Saying this, young Jack led the way to the camp.

He passed over the body of Ted Hammond, the escaped convict.

The scoundrel was as dead as a stone.

Jack's bullet had pierced his heart.

The camp presented a gory scene, the ground being flooded with blood, and the betrayed rangers were either dead or dying.

It had been an easy victory.

Jack counted the victims; they amounted to ten.

"It has been a massacre," he said. "I don't think one has escaped."

He knew nothing about the flight of Bob Morgan.

"We give um toko, Mast' Jack," replied Monday.

"Now we must look out for the queen and Tinker."

"You and Mast' Harry get a little bit of sleep."

"Will you do sentry go?"

"That's what I mean, sar. This child wide awake enough."

"All right. Wake me when you are tired. Keep a good lookout."

"What do you take me for? I'm all there," replied Monday.

He sat down, with his rifle in his arms; and young Jack and Harry laid on the ground, like old campaigners, and were soon fast asleep.

They had triumphed, and their minds were satisfied.

From Morgan's widow they did not expect much trouble.

Before daylight they hoped to shake Tinker by the hand.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FIGHTING SUE'S REVENGE.

WHEN Bob Morgan made his escape he went as fast as he was able in the direction of the road that led to the "Bully Boy." As we know, the path was pretty well marked out and defined by the use the bushrangers had made of it.

The light shed by the stars and the moon rendered walking comparatively easy.

His wound in the arm was bleeding freely.

When he had gone a certain distance, and thought himself out of danger, he halted.

Tearing the sleeve off his shirt, he bound it round the wound as well as he was able to do.

He imagined that the sheriff had attacked the camp.

It was also his opinion that Ted Hammond had been employed by the authorities to betray him and his friends.

Bitterly he blamed himself for putting trust in him.

Deep were his curses on the traitor.

If he could have got hold of him, this man would have strangled him.

Morgan hoped to meet his sister-in-law on her way back. Nor was he disappointed.

Scarcely had he finished binding up his wounded arm, then she appeared with Tinker.

The boy was labouring along with a large bottle of spirits, and the Queen of the Bushrangers carried a basket of provisions.

"You here!" exclaimed Mrs. Morgan.

Her countenance expressed the surprise she felt.

"As you see," he replied.

"We did not want you to come and meet us," she continued. "The boy knows his way about, and I wasn't brought up in the woods to be scared by an owl."

"I could not help myself."

"How is that?"

"We have been attacked. I don't know exactly how it was done, but a fellow named Ted Hammond gave us away."

"I know him. An escaped convict!" cried Mrs. Morgan.

"That's the boy. He always was a wrong 'un."

"As a rule, dog doesn't eat dog. What did he want to spoil us for?"

"That's a mystery. He came to the camp; we made him welcome as the flowers in May; we drank, we sang, and fell asleep. He stole our arms. Then came the attack."

"By whom?"

"I don't know. The enemy were concealed in the bush."

"Was it the sheriff or Harkaway?" asked Mrs. Morgan, biting her lips with vexation till the blood came.

"Don't I say I can't tell you?" replied Bob Morgan.

"I wish you wouldn't be so irritable."

"You would be, if you had a bullet in your arm."

"Are you wounded?"

Bob showed her his arm.

"Excuse me," she exclaimed, "I didn't know. Who is hurt beside you?"

"They are all dead."

"The whole band?"

"Every man Jack of them, except me, and I escaped by the skin of my teeth."

"Why didn't you fight?"

"Heaven bless you! How could we? Talk sense. That infernal scoundrel, Ted Hammond, had robbed us of our weapons while we slept; we hadn't even a knife left."

"Drunk, as usual, I expect."

"Drop going on at me!" cried Bob. "We didn't look for any surprise."

"You should have kept a watch. It wouldn't have happened if I had been there."

"What could you have done?"

"I'd have put a stop to the carnage," said Fighting Sue. "You men want a woman about you, with her head screwed on right."

"Give us a rest!"

"It's a pity they didn't give you one, you thick-headed fool!"

"Bullying me won't bring the boys back to life."

Sue set her arms akimbo, and looked at him, shrewishly.

"What do you propose to do now?" she quivered.

"Skip," he replied.

"Where to?"

"I don't know. This place is too red-hot for us."

"You coward!" she hissed.

"We're alone, and we've got to go."

"And you're the brother of the great bushranger—my late husband! You haven't got the pluck of a kangaroo, nor yet a cockatoo."

"I don't want my neck stretched."

"You ought to have it extended," said Mrs. Morgan, bitterly. "Go, if you want to. Leave me to fight it out alone."

"What's the good of stopping?"

"I mean to have it out with Jack Harkaway. It's him or me. He was the cause of my husband's death."

"This is madness!"

"Call it what you like, I mean what I say. Sometimes I believe that I am mad. My poor husband loved me, and I loved him. It is an awful loss. My head burns like fire when I think of it."

"I sympathise with you, Sue."

"Hang your sympathy! I want your help," she

rejoined. "You know very well that I left my home, came out here, and risked every thing to be revenged on Harkaway."

"Well, my good woman," replied Bob, "the game's up. What can we do after this set out?"

"I'll stick it."

"It will be the death of both of us."

"I don't care. You, nor anyone else, won't make me budge from this bush."

"You're insane. Let us get away. You have money in the bank. My brother left you well off."

"What of that?"

"Change the name and go to New Zealand. Start farming or apple-growing."

"Not if I know it. I'm a desperate woman."

"Sit down," said Bob, "and let us talk this matter over—reason it out."

"You're white-livered, and haven't got any go in you. Why, your brother was fifty times a better man than you are."

"I can't help what my brother was."

"Never mind. I tell you, mad or not mad, I won't leave these parts, until I have settled accounts with the Harkaways—father and son."

"If that is so, I shall have to stay by you, Sue, though losing all our men is a sad pullback," said Bob Morgan.

"You can sneak away, if you like."

"No, no."

"I can fight it out alone. I'll haunt the town Harkaway and his party live in. I'll shoot in the dark, like a phantom. Ha, ha! there's an idea for you."

"The phantom shot," repeated Bob.

"Yes. They shall fall, one by one."

"Good. And not know where the sudden death comes from?"

"They can guess, and that's all. I'll hide, but I'll strike; so you can go, Bob Morgan, as soon as you please."

"Not me, Sue. I'll not desert a woman, especially one such as you are."

"Don't waste your breath in complimenting me."

"You've got grit in you, right up to your finger-tips."

"Yes. I mean to show it, too," replied the Queen of the Bushrangers.

She held out her hand.

"Put it there, Bob," she added, "I'm real glad you're going to stand by me; but, so help me! I'd have stood my ground alone."

"I'll bet you would, Sue. Don't I know you?"

"Being your brother's wife, you ought to. I say, Bob, I'm afraid I'm not quite right in my head."

"You've had a shock, my girl."

"A great one. Nobody knows how I loved that man."

"Morgan wasn't a bad sort of chap," said Bob.

"He was a prince. What do you think he was always saying to me when he came home?"

"Give it up."

"I'll tell you," added Mrs. Morgan. "His one idea—when he had made enough money—was to go and live with me on one of the South Sea Islands."

"I've heard him speak of it."

"He wasn't a bloodthirsty man, really. I always found him nice and gentle. Ah! I've met with a loss; but, mark me, Bob——"

"Well?"

"I'm solid on revenge."

"Who can blame you?"

"Those interfering Harkaways shall suffer."

"Death to the whole blooming kit, I say!" Bob rejoined.

"Right you are. I mean to start on this coloured boy first," exclaimed Fighting Sue.

She pointed to Tinker.

He was close by, with the case bottle of spirits in his arms.

There was a merry twinkle in his eye.

He had heard the conversation that had passed between Fighting Sue and Bob Morgan.

The band of brigands was destroyed.

By whom?

That was the question he asked himself.

Tinker answered it in the right way.

"My young master come after me; very good biz," he muttered. "Kill all rangers, 'cept one. Wish he kill old Sue; she bad egg."

"What's the boy done?" inquired Bob.

"Nothing," replied Sue.

"If he's been uncivil, I'll leather him."

"Taint that. The boy's right enough, and makes a first-class servant."

"Then what fault do you find with him?"

"None at all. I ain't finding fault."

"But you said you meant to kill him."

"So I do."

"It's no use killing for nothing," Bob remonstrated.

"Not that niggers are worth much."

"He's one of the crowd."

"Oh, I see what you mean now. He belongs to Harkaway's crew?"

"Certainly. He has told me that young Jack Harkaway is very much attached to him."

Tinker stepped forward.

"Scuse me, ma'am," he said, "that quite true. When you talk of killing me, you make me feel bad. My young master pay you well to let me go back to Harkawayville."

"Not if I know it, young lampblack. You'll go to kingdom come before you go to the other shop," rejoined Fighting Sue.

"Don't be hard on a poor chap," pleaded Tinker.

"You've got to die."

"I's too young for that. Ease up on me a bit, lady."

"Can't be done at the price, you lump of animated stove-polish."

"Golly! You call me some funny names."

"I'll make an example of you, which will strike terror into the hearts of the Harkaways."

Tinker set down the bottle.

He folded his arms in just the same defiant manner that the queen had done.

"What's that you say?" he demanded.

"Keep your ears open," she replied.

"If you think any thing you can do can frighten Jack Harkaway or keep him off your track when he's once started, you make heap big mistake."

"Shut up your mouth," cried Fighting Sue. "You're too saucy for me."

"Kill me next minute, but I'll speak first," Tinker answered, boldly.

"I sha'n't do any thing to you till morning, but I'll put the chain on, and fasten you to a tree."

"Needn't think I'd run."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," laughed Mrs. Morgan. "You don't know nothing, do you? Lor' bless your pretty innocent young soul, you wouldn't bolt. Oh, dear, no! Only when you got the chance."

"I like the pleasure of your society, ma'am, too much to leave you without giving notice."

"Crumbs," said Fighting Sue, "you're a cheeky young nig. If I hadn't a grudge against your friends and protectors, the Harkaways, I'd let you go loose."

"It would be all the better for you, ma'am."

"That's what you say."

With this remark, she opened the basket she had been carrying, and took out a small, but strong steel chain.

Putting it round his leg, just above the ankle, she fastened him to the trunk of a tree by means of a padlock, of which she retained the key.

He was thus thoroughly secured.

It was impossible for him to run away.

The cruellest part of the business was, he was chained up so tightly, that he was unable to lie down on the ground.

He had been walking a long way.

The boy was thoroughly exhausted and wanted a rest, which he could only obtain by leaning against the tree.

This he did.

His eyes were closed, but his ears were open.

"Now, Bob," she exclaimed, "we'll camp out here, in the open, and have a bit of grub and a drink."

"With all the pleasure in life, Suey," replied Bob Morgan.

She produced some provisions.

They both ate heartily, and drank some spirits and water; after this, Bob produced his pipe, pouch of tobacco, and box of matches.

Strange to relate, Fighting Sue did the same.

She acted in every way just as a man would.

In fact, there was more of the masculine than the feminine gender about her.

"Light up, Sue," said Bob Morgan.

"You bet," she replied; "that's what I'm on for, and then a doss down on the ground."

"I wish we had a blanket," remarked Bob. "It's turning kind of chilly."

"You will have to put up with that, my man, until we have wiped out these detested Harkaways; then I will take you with me to Fiji."

"I'd dearly love to go."

"It's a bargain. Let me have my revenge, and I'm off. Be good to me, Bob, for your dead brother's sake."

"I will, Sue, believe me."

"You ought. He was always kind to both of us."

"Don't I know it, girl? Take a rest," said Bob. "What are you going to do with the boy?"

"Roast him," replied she, with a vixenish look, "and serve him up half done."

"What do you mean?"

She laughed maniacally.

Her eyes glared in the most fearful manner.

There could be no doubt whatever that she was half mad, if not entirely so.

Recent events had affected her mind in a most deplorable manner.

Bob Morgan began to feel afraid of his sister-in-law.

The whisky she was drinking, and the strong tobacco she smoked, did not improve her temper.

"You know where they hanged Rook," said Fighting Sue.

"Yes; it was on the road leading to the 'Bully Boy,'" Bob answered.

"Some of the Harkaway party came up and cut him down. He's alive and well, I've heard."

"That's more luck than some men meet with."

"Perhaps he'll have worse before long, if I can get on his track."

"I've marked the spot where they strung him up. It was a tree that had been struck by lightning."

"That's it. I intend to take this boy Tinker there to-morrow morning, chain him to the tree, light some green wood under him, and suffocate him to death."

"That's a wild idea."

"Just suits my frame of mind. He has told me that he is young Jack Harkaway's pet boy, and it will be a blow to the party. What do you think?"

"A regular body blow, and a facer, too," replied Bob.

"That's number one. I'll be on to the rest soon. People going up and down the road will soon see the

body of the boy. Ha, ha ! they didn't kill my poor husband for nothing."

"You're a fair scorcher, Sue."

"Never mind what I am. All I live for is revenge," she rejoined.

In a few minutes, the pipe she was smoking dropped from her hand ; she sank back on the ground and went to sleep.

It was not long before Bob Morgan followed her example.

When the day broke they were still asleep.

Tinker was in a most uncomfortable state.

He was hungry, thirsty, and stiff from the position he had been compelled to maintain.

"Hi, hi !" he cried, "there's nothing golumpshus 'bout this. If you are going to roast me, it's time to begin."

Mrs. Morgan and Bob woke up.

They made a breakfast as well as they could, and gave the boy something.

His cravings were satisfied ; he was unchained, and the three made a start for the road.

Not a word was spoken during the journey.

When the blasted tree was reached, the boy was chained to it.

Fighting Sue and Bob collected wood and threw it round his lower limbs.

Some dry grass was then piled against it.

Tinker looked anxiously up and down the road. Nobody was to be seen.

A terrible death awaited him.

Sue's mouth was hard set ; there was no mercy to be expected from such a mad woman.

"Now, a match," she said.

Bob Morgan gave her one.

"Lord help me," muttered Tinker. "I never see young master again."

It indeed looked as if his fate was sealed. Only a miracle could save him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A REMARKABLE DREAM.

SUDDENLY young Jack woke up with a start.

He sprang to his feet.

It was still dark, but the stars were shining brightly.

Monday was on guard, alert and vigilant.

If there was any danger, or work to be done, he despised the idea of sleep.

But when all was over, he could slumber for twenty-four hours at a stretch.

"You woke up, Mast' Jack," he exclaimed.

"Yes," replied Jack. "I had a bad dream."

"What that 'bout, sar?"

"My boy Tinker. I thought he told me he was in great danger from fire."

"That very funny thing, Mast' Jack," said Monday.

"What a little chap like him doing with fire?"

"I can't tell," continued Jack; "but I am positive the boy is in danger. I saw him distinctly, and there was a piteous, appealing look on his face, as if he was crying, 'Do help me!'"

"My people always pay great 'tention to dream faces, sar," remarked Monday.

"I have heard father say they are highly superstitious."

"All the same. Golly! white man no better than black."

"What do you mean?"

"Try for good luck and believe in omens," Monday answered. "Spill salt; that bad. See new moon through glass; that bad, too. No luck all month."

"You are right. Human nature is the same all the world over."

"We drop that subject, sar. What is to be done for poor little Tinker boy?"

"I shouldn't like to lose him."

"Certainly not. Wouldn't do at all, Mast' Jack."

"I think as much of Tinker, whom I discovered here in Australia, as my father did of you, when he invented and patented you in the island of Limbi."

"Ah, he always call me Old Reliable, because he could always depend on me."

"You've got something in that old numskull of yours. Advise me what to do."

"I's got a theorem of my own."

"Theory, you mean," corrected Jack.

"That's the bird. You cotched him that time, captain. Now jes' you listen to me. It doesn't take anyone all night to go to the 'Bully Boy' and back."

"No. I should call it a couple of hours, each way."

"And you'd be pretty near the mark."

"Well, go on."

"Fighting Sue has been stopped on the way," Monday said, in a significant tone.

"Who by?" asked Jack.

"I reckon one—perhaps two—of the rangers escaped our fire. We not know 'xactly how many there was."

"Quite correct. One may have got off wounded, and we did not see him in the smoke and hurry."

"Very good. You follow me so far, Mast' Jack. I see I shall make you understand presently. Some people got thick heads."

"Do you mean me?"

"Didn't mention no names. Too perlite—too much the gentleman for that, sar."

"If you were as cheeky twenty years ago as you are now, I wonder my father didn't make his bootmaker acquainted with your tailor."

"You mean, he kick me?"

"That's about the size of what I intended to convey."

"Your father very brave man, Mast' Jack, but it was always more than he dare do to lay so much as his little finger on me."

Monday said this so very gravely that young Jack burst out laughing right in his face.

"What for you make that guffaw?" asked the Prince of Limbi.

"You confounded old liar," cried Jack. "I can't call you any thing else."

"Something the matter with you, now, eh?"

"Why, I've seen my governor sling you around the room, wipe the floor and sit on you, when you've annoyed him and he's been in a bad temper. Deny that, if you can."

"He do it all in fun," replied Monday.

"I shouldn't have called it fun, by a long way."

"Ah! Bah!" exclaimed Monday. "I let your father have his own way, perhaps, a little too much."

"Because you couldn't help yourself."

"He very playful, and I liked him. All he knows I taught him."

"Shut up! I'm tired of listening to you. If you can't lie and brag, nobody can."

"My trumpeter dead, sar, so obliged to blow um trumpet umself," replied Monday. "Yah, yah!"

"Good joke, isn't it?"

"Fust-class. It's all right when you know me."

"Go on with your theory," said Jack.

"It's coming to it. Don't you hurry my cattle."

"You're so jolly long-winded."

"It's your pleasant company, Mast' Jack. I like to enjoy it."

"Aren't you a flattering old humbug? Do you want to borrow a fiver?" Jack inquired.

"I could do with a score," Monday answered. "I lost lot of money lately playing euchre in Harkawayville, sar."

"More fool you."

"Thank you for nothing. I didn't expect much sympathy from you, but now I get none, I leave you to find that boy Tinker yourself," said Monday, indignantly.

"Don't be cross, old fellow."

"Then you jes' behave yourself, Mast' Jack. I'll do what I can for Tinker, but you mustn't place no Tinkers before me."

"Jealous, are you?"

"I's been in the family longer than Tinker. Your father set great store by me."

"Be happy and contented. I really had no idea of casting you in the background, only I am so anxious about the boy."

"Orright. If want to find him, better march."

"Where to?"

"Find tracks of Fighting Sue. I telling you that Mrs. Morgan, the Queen of the Bushrangers, has met some one who escaped from our fire. He stopped and turned her back. If not, she'd have been here before now."

"That's what I think."

"Then this man, whoever he is, tell her about how we slaughter, kill, and massacre them."

"Of course he would do that."

"The queen say, in great rage, 'That's this Harkaway or his son doing this. Tinker's the son's boy. I'll have my revenge out on him.'"

Jack clapped his hands together.

"By Jove, old son, I think you've struck the right nail on the head this time."

"Certain sure I have, sar."

"Poor Tinker is perhaps to be tortured in some horrible way by fire."

"This child wouldn't wonder, Mast' Jack."

"I'll wake Harry up."

"Um ready to start at a moment's notice."

"Good. We'll soon see what you are made of," replied young Jack.

He stepped over the corpses of the bushrangers, and going up to Harry Girdwood, roused him, in his rough-and-ready campaigning fashion, by giving him a slight kick in the ribs.

Harry rose at once.

Being told about the dream, he willingly joined them in the search for Tinker.

It was broad daylight when young Jack, Harry Girdwood, and the ever faithful Monday reached the high road, which led from the town of Masdon to Harkawayville.

They had not proceeded far before they heard cries for help. A thick smoke arose from the trunk of a tree by the roadside. No one was to be seen.

The road was entirely deserted.

"By heaven!" cried Jack, "some foul work is going on."

"Hurry up," said Harry.

Monday drew his knife, and ran up the road with the fleetness of a hare.

In a few minutes he was seen by Jack and Harry, who followed more leisurely, to be throwing some burning wood on one side.

They then saw the form of a boy, tied to the tree.

His head was hanging down, as if the smoke had asphyxiated him to some extent.

Monday cut him down and laid him on the grass.

"It's Tinker," said Jack. "I hope he isn't dead."

"We're just in time, I guess," replied Harry.

"Wasn't mine a remarkable dream?"

"Rather; there is more in dreams than most people think. Poor Tinker! he's been badly treated."

They now reached the spot where Monday was bending over the boy.

They were not mistaken in their conjecture.

It was Tinker, and they had arrived just in time to save his life.

Fighting Sue and Bob Morgan had set fire to the dry wood they had placed around the body of the helpless Tinker.

When they were satisfied that it was thoroughly alight, they beat a retreat.

This was only a few seconds before Monday ran up.

They saw Monday, and also Jack and Harry.

A large gum-tree was close by.

It did not take them a moment to dart behind it.

This afforded them shelter, and at the same time enabled them to hide.

They wanted to see what was about to take place.

Their plan had been confounded at the eleventh hour.

Tinker, their hapless victim, was not to die this time.

The boy was reviving.

Plenty of fresh air inflated his lungs; he heaved a deep sigh, and opened his eyes.

"That you, master?" he said, in a weak tone. "How you find me out?"

"I had a dream," replied Jack. "I thank heaven you are all right."

"Pretty near done for."

"Who did it?"

"Fighting Sue. All her men killed, 'cept Bob Morgan. They been attacked in the dark."

"Did they try to burn you?"

"That was the racket," Tinker answered. "It mighty hard, cruel bit of business."

"So I should think."

"Sue say that I your boy, and have revenge by tying me to tree, putting sticks round my legs, and setting them alight."

"Where are they?"

"I dunno. Bob Morgan strike a match, smoke come up, and my head go dizzy."

"Can you walk?"

"Reckon so. Give me a hand up, master."

Young Jack assisted him to rise.

He was a little shaky on his legs, but the fire had not burnt him.

It was only the smoke that had affected him.

Jack had a flask of brandy in his pocket.

He gave him a little.

The dram seemed to put new life into him.

"This am golopshus," he exclaimed. "I feel good as gold after that."

"You're grinning like a monkey."

"Can't help myself. You saved my life, and I never forget you," said Tinker.

He seized Jack's hand, and, raising it to his lips, kissed it with every demonstration of affection.

It showed that he was of a loving disposition.

"P'raps," he added, with his eyes full of tears, "I have the chance of saving you some day."

"I'm sure you would if you could."

"I'd die for you, master."

"Better live for me. I should much prefer it," replied Jack, laughing.

"You very kind to poor, ignorant, native bush-boy, but my heart good."

"I know that, and wherever I go you shall accompany me."

"That make me happy."

"You'll learn a lot as you grow older. At the same time, it isn't a classical education that makes the man. Universities can't do everything."

"I serve you well, master," answered Tinker.

Monday touched him on the shoulder.

"You say nothing to me," he exclaimed. "Didn't I come up first, and kick um sticks away, put out the fire, and cut um down?"

"Yes, Mister Monday. You very good fellow," rejoined Tinker.

"It took you a long time to find that out."

"I thank you very much, and Mister Harry, too. Poor Tinker been burnt to a cinder, but for you."

"Mind you behave yourself in future, young man," said Monday.

"Me always do that."

"Um have um doubts about it."

"That will do," exclaimed young Jack. "We have rescued the boy, who isn't half a bad sort, and the question that arises is, what are we to do next?"

"Let us hold a council of war," said Harry.

"Agreed. I'll be the general in command. Let me hear the views of all of you, but don't all speak at once."

"I'll start first," replied Harry.

"Go ahead, then; sail in."

"We can see how horribly savage and vindictive Mrs. Morgan, or Fighting Sue as they call her, is."

"No discount on that," said Jack.

"Not a ha'p'orth. I believe the woman is mad, or she would not dream of burning a boy at the stake."

"Perhaps the death of her husband and the destruction of the two bands, hers and his, has driven her crazy."

"It must be so."

"And Bob Morgan is as bad, or he would not aid and abet her."

"I quite agree with you," answered Harry. "Now, we've got to face a hard fact, and facts are stubborn things."

"What's that?"

"Fighting Sue is dead against your father, you, and all of us."

"We need not care for her, because we shall go back to England now we have recovered Tinker," remarked young Jack.

"Don't take the matter so easy as that."

"What is there to fear?"

"The woman and the man have escaped."

"But they are only two."

"At the same time, my dear Jack, they are powerful for evil. Two determined persons can do a lot of harm, and I'll bet you that they will do some harm to some of us before we can quit Harkawayville and get to the nearest railway-station, which, as you know, is a long way off."

"What do you advise?"

"They must be hunted down and captured."

"That is a large order."

Jack turned to Monday.

"What is your opinion, old ebony?" he asked.

"Um of the same mind as Mast' Girdwood, boss, that's me," answered Monday.

"Hunt them down. Look upon them as wild beasts or poisonous snakes, that ought to be exterminated," said Harry.

"Now, Tinker, let us hear from you," continued Jack.

"I have no wisdom like you folks," replied Tinker, "but I'd like to speak what I think."

"Certainly; speak freely. Kids like you often talk sense."

"My advice, master," said Tinker, "is to go home, and ask your father what to do."

Jack smiled.

"That's not a bad idea," he replied.

"Your father very clever man, sir; been all over the world and know a trick or two."

"So he does."

"Very brave. Got good head on him."

"What he doesn't know, isn't worth knowing," said Jack, who was proud of his father.

"One of the cleverest men on the face of the earth, that's my opinion," added Tinker.

"Yes; he forgot, ten years ago, what most men know at seventy."

"You come back home, master, and he settle this question better than you."

"I will be guided by you," answered young Jack.

"That um best way," remarked Monday.

"Couldn't do better," observed Harry. "But how about grub? I have internal rumblings; in fact, I'm as empty as a drum. I could eat a raw turnip."

"We're not far from the 'Bully Boy.' I dare say old Garrat will provide us a good feed."

"Hurrah! a splendid suggestion."

"Might have had a bit of me," said Tinker, "on'y I didn't have time to roast."

"Go on," replied Jack; "do you think we're cannibals?"

"What you call them?"

"If ever you are wrecked in the South Seas, you'll find out, my lad."

"Come on," cried Harry; "I'll be satisfied with a mutton chop and a damper."

They wasted no more time in conversation, but walked at a quick pace up the road.

Although they knew it not, they passed by Fighting Sue and Bob Morgan.

The capacious trunk of the tree effectually concealed them.

Neither of the four had the remotest idea that their enemies were so close to them.

In a short time they arrived at the roadside tavern, and were cordially received by Garrat, who knew them well.

He told them of the death of the sheriff, and was, apparently, glad to hear that the band of bushrangers had been almost exterminated.

In his heart he felt sorry for it.

The rangers had always been good customers of his, and he really regretted their loss.

His sympathy was with the lawless desperadoes.

But he had to put on a fair face with Jack, and make out that he hated them.

A breakfast of meat, eggs, coffee, and damper, as the unleavened bread is called, with the addition of some kangaroo-tail soup—considered a delicacy—was rapidly provided.

The hungry party sat down to enjoy it.

Monday kept on getting up from the table and looking out of the window, which commanded a view of the road.

"What's your little game?" enquired young Jack.

"Got to wink the other eye, sar," replied Monday.

"I don't understand you."

"Keep a look-out for Fighting Sue. She not far off."

"You're right," said Jack.

He put his revolver on the table by his plate.

It was as well to be prepared for all emergencies.

There was no foretelling what might happen.

A certain amount of anxiety was depicted on every face.

But that did not take the edge off their appetites, "for they eat like horses, when you hear them eat," as Tennyson says.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

WHEN young Jack and his party passed the tree behind which the Queen of the Bushrangers was hiding, with her brother-in-law, Bob Morgan, she was wild with vexation.

In the height of her temper, she raised her revolver.

Her intention was to shoot young Jack and Tinker, if she could not kill Harry and Monday.

She would have risked it, had not Bob stopped her.

He grasped her wrist firmly.

Her hand was lowered, and the pistol directed towards the ground.

"Are you mad?" asked Bob.

"Yes," she replied, in a despondent tone, "I am as crazy as any Bess of Bedlam."

"Have sense enough not to draw their fire."

"What do I care what becomes of me?"

"That's all very well from your point of view," protested Bob; "but I have a decided objection to being shot, or my carcase otherwise perforated."

"I shall never be the same woman again," continued Fighting Sue. "All I live for now is revenge! When I have killed Jack Harkaway and his son, I shall be content to die, and join my beloved husband, I hope, in another world."

"What good is revenge?" asked Bob.

Fighting Sue clasped her hands ecstatically together.

"Oh! it is sweet—sweet!" she cried, rapturously.

"Don't talk like a blooming idiot," replied Bob, coarsely and angrily.

"I mean it from my heart."

"You women always indulge in some sentimental rot. Now, I'll tell you what is ever so much better than revenge."

"Name it," said Mrs. Morgan.

"Gold—money. You and I might make a stake out here by robbing some bank, and nip off to New South Wales without anyone being a bit the wiser."

"No, no!" Sue replied, shaking her head in a melancholy manner.

"Cheer up; don't be downhearted."

"I am in an abyss of despair, from which nothing can extricate me. Money, home, everything has lost its charms for me, except revenge."

"You're a crank, a regular crackpot, on the subject," said Morgan, crossly.

"Call me what you like. The Harkaways, father and son, shall die by my hand. When their bodies are mouldering in the cold hard ground, as is that of my poor dear husband, I shall be satisfied, not before."

"You and I can't travel together, Sue!"

"I did not expect you to support me, after the band was destroyed."

"It is too much to expect."

"You are too selfish, my dear fellow," exclaimed Fighting Sue. "I know you better than you know yourself."

"I shall be off South. Our paths diverge right here. The Harkaways are tough nuts to crack, and I'm not going to try the game on."

"So be it. Go your way, and I'll go mine."

"It is a desperate resolve, my girl. I hope you will pull through, but I don't think you will."

"Coward! my star has not yet set."

As she spoke she drew herself up proudly. Her eyes flashed defiance, and her bosom heaved with emotion.

Bob Morgan knew her moods well, and fell back, fearing to utter anything to irritate her.

All at once they heard the clattering of a horse's hoofs.

The animal was coming towards them, from an easterly direction.

On its back was a stout, middle-aged man, of the farmer class.

Presumably a sheep farmer, who had been to Masdon on business.

Slung over the pommel of his saddle, were two bags or holsters.

This indicated that he lived at some distance, and had to go a long journey.

The bags, no doubt, contained provisions, clothing, and perhaps cash.

The traveller did not see the Queen of the Bushrangers nor Bob Morgan.

He jogged on his way, happily and contentedly enough.

A satisfied smile sat on his rubicund countenance, which seemed to indicate that he had made a good bargain.

No suspicion of danger crossed his mind.

It was to him, as if bushrangers did not exist.

"Hush!" whispered Fighting Sue. "Mine!"

"All right! If you want a horse, have it. I can foot it where I am going. It's nothing new to me to pad the hoof."

He put his back against the tree, and watched his sister-in-law.

Fighting Sue stepped out boldly into the road.

She stood in front of the traveller, pistol in hand.

"Halt!" she cried.

The man turned pale at the sight of this armed Amazon in his path.

It portended danger, perhaps death.

He drew rein in an instant, but did not attempt to defend either himself or his property.

"Take all I have!" he whined; "but spare my life."

"Get down from that horse," replied Sue.

The traveller did so.

"Throw your shooting-iron upon the road," she continued.

"I haven't got one. I'm Titus West, the Quaker; fighting's against my religion," was the answer.

"What have you got in your saddle-bags?"

"Only clothes, good woman, and a bag of biscuits to sustain me on my journey. Let me have them, I pray you."

"No, they are mine. I don't believe they hold what you say."

"Yea, verily."

"I shall keep the horse and the bags. You can make tracks."

"My steed is valuable. Who art thou, woman of wrath and violence?"

"Fighting Sue Morgan, wife of the bushranger. Cut it, quick," she answered.

"Art thou not afraid of punishment here, and of more in the dread hereafter?"

"I fear nothing—never did. I wasn't made that way."

"This is cruel of thee, sister. Many miles shall I have to trudge down this lonely road, ere I rejoin my wife and children."

"Bob!" cried Mrs. Morgan.

The bushranger emerged from his place of concealment.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Just oblige me by booting this chap, and helping him on his way," said Sue.

"Right you are, my beauty."

He made a rush for the Quaker, Titus West, and caught him as he darted into some scrub growing by the roadside.

He gave him a blow on the head with his clenched fist, which partially stunned him.

Returning to Sue, he said, "I've settled the Quaker. Let us see what the saddle-bags contain."

They untied them.

In one they found an abundant supply of cold fowl, ham, roast mutton, and damper, some whisky, bottled beer, and wine.

In the other was a bundle of clothing, and a hundred and fifty sovereigns in a canvas bag.

"Halves!" cried Bob Morgan, as he counted the money and filled his pockets.

"Take the dross! I shall not need it," replied Fighting Sue.

"All of it, do you mean?"

"Every pound."

"By George! Sue, you're a trump! I wish you would come with me."

"No. My task must be worked out here, I tell you."

"Have your way, though I'm sorry for you."

"I don't want your pity. My life is done, for all practical purposes. I am dead already."

"What do you mean?"

"When I have destroyed those who destroyed mine, I will die with pleasure, by my own hand," Sue replied, determinedly.

"I can't help it. A man might as well talk to a brick wall, as argue with an obstinate woman."

"Death to the Harkaways!"

"By all means ; kill the whole party if you like, root and branch," said Bob.

"If I don't——"

"Let the matter drop, and have some refreshment. The Quaker didn't mean to starve on his journey," interrupted Bob.

Taking out his knife, the bushranger helped himself to fowl and ham, and a bottle of beer.

Fighting Sue looked on in sullen silence.

"Aren't you going to join in?" he enquired.

"I can't eat. My brain is over-excited. Where do you think they have led the bush-boy to?" she replied.

"Up the road to the 'Bully Boy,' I expect, to get some breakfast."

"I'll ride there."

Fighting Sue sprang upon the horse's back.

She was an excellent rider, and could sit in the saddle all day long, with a man's endurance.

He saw that it was no use to try to persuade her to accompany him.

As far as he was concerned, his brother, the notorious bushranger, was dead, and there was an end of the matter.

Morgan the elder had made the Australian continent ring with his name.

But, after what had recently happened, Bob had no desire to take his place.

He held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Sue!" he said. "I suppose it is useless for me to say, 'Heaven bless you!' but you know what I mean."

"Heaven has not blessed me living, it will not do so dead," she replied, coldly.

"It's a hard world, Sue."

"To some ; not to all."

"I suppose it's what we make it. For my part, I've a mind to work for an honest living."

"You?" she cried, scornfully. "You couldn't do it. Farewell! we shall never meet again."

Her words were prophetic.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ONE BY HERSELF.

THEY shook hands, Bob being between her and the bush. This action saved her life, but lost him his own.

The Quaker whom they had robbed had been forgotten by them.

He had recovered from the knockdown blow he had received.

When he had stated that he was not armed, he told a falsehood.

In his pocket he had a pistol.

Enraged at being robbed and assaulted, he determined to try and get back his own.

Stepping into the road, he presented his pistol, and fired at Fighting Sue.

His aim was a good one.

He had not been shooting kangaroo, rabbits, and wallaby all his life for nothing.

The bullet sped on its way.

It was at this very juncture that Bob Morgan shook hands with his sister-in law.

He stepped straight in a line with the ball.

It struck him in the back, and went direct to his heart.

With a hollow, sepulchral groan, the bushranger fell heavily to the ground.

Fighting Sue knew in a moment where to find her revolver.

There was no hesitation about her movements.

Before the Quaker could shoot again, she fired.

The bullet struck him in the forehead.

It was buried in his brain.

Throwing up his arms wildly, he sank down in a convulsed heap.

Whipping up her horse—it was hers by capture now—Fighting Sue galloped up the road.

“I am one by myself!” she muttered. “That is what I thought it would come to; but I have lived alone and worked alone before—and can do it again.”

She sat the horse like a man.

The inn kept by Garrat, and called the "Bully Boy," was, as we know, only a few miles up the road.

Young Jack and his companions did not know her.

On the landlord she thought she could rely for assistance and shelter.

He had been a staunch friend of her late husband's.

The bushrangers had spent a large portion of their ill-gotten gains in his tavern.

He had known most of them intimately, and had received stolen goods from them.

Why should she not rely upon such a man as this?

But she did not thoroughly understand the character of Garrat.

There were two sides of it, as she had yet to find out.

He loved himself first, and everyone else afterwards.

Riding into the stable yard, she hitched the horse to a post, and looked around her.

The landiord of the "Bully Boy" was standing at his back door.

She advanced, and greeted him warmly.

"Who have you here?" she asked.

"Young Jack Harkaway, and three friends," replied Garrat. "They are breakfasting; and a very jolly party they are."

"I will soon put a stop to their jollity!"

"What do you intend to do?"

"Never mind—you will see presently. Have they spoken about me?"

"A good deal. They destroyed your band last night, and this morning saved the bushboy, Tinker, when you had started to burn him."

"Quite true. Curses on them!"

"Are all the men gone?" asked Garrat, leading her into a small room.

"Every one of them," answered Fighting Sue.

"That's bad. What are you going to do?" enquired Garrat.

"Have my revenge on the two Harkaways, and then put an ounce of lead in my brain."

"Better go home, and make the best of it."

"Not I. Do you think I want to live? Let me stay here till the party start for Harkawayville, and I'll give them four chambers out of my revolver," said Fighting Sue.

"Certainly. You are welcome. Can I get you any thing?"

"No. I require neither meat nor drink at present. Leave me. Tell me when they are about to start."

"I will not fail to do so," rejoined Garrat.

"If you deceive me, beware!"

"Is it likely I should do so? Depend on me. I am your true friend—as I was your husband, Mr. Morgan's"

"Thanks. I believe you!" she replied.

The room was a private parlour—like all the apartments on the ground-floor of the inn. The windows were heavily barred.

No one could get in or out that way.

This was a precaution taken against tramps, and bad characters generally.

The key of the door was on the outside.

As Garrat closed the door, he softly turned the key.

The door was effectually locked.

Fighting Sue was a prisoner, although she had not the least inkling of the plot.

Going into the apartment where young Jack and the rest had been breakfasting, Garrat found them ready to depart.

"Bill, landlord! What's the damage—how much do I owe you?" cried young Jack.

"Nothing, Mr. Harkaway," answered Garrat.

"Oh! that won't do."

"I shall make no charge."

"But I like to pay my way, wherever I go, and not lay myself under an obligation or favour to anybody."

"Your company and patronage is an honour that overpays me."

"Lay it on thick. What are you driving at?" demanded Jack.

"Would you give any reward for the capture of Mrs. Morgan, alias Fighting Sue?" asked Garrat.

"Yes. I'll guarantee you a hundred pounds."

"Who from?"

"My father will pay it," replied young Jack.

"Good enough! You can have her."

"In the bush, I suppose. But we've got to catch her first."

"Not at all! She's one by herself now, and she's securely confined in this house."

"You don't mean it !"

"I do ; true as gospel !"

All looked at him in amazement.

They were scarcely able to believe the evidence of their senses.

Garrat briefly explained how Fighting Sue had come to him for shelter, with the ultimate intention of killing Jack Harkaway and his son, and how he had trapped her.

"Bravo !" exclaimed Jack. "That is splendid. Keep her under lock and key. Stop here, Harry, Monday, and Tinker. Give me a horse ; I'll ride over to Masdon, and get a couple of constables."

"No occasion for that," said Garrat.

"Why not ?"

"You know Sheriff Hardrock was murdered here yesterday."

"Yes," answered Jack.

"I have sent for the police. They will be here directly."

"Excellent !"

Suddenly there was a great noise at the end of the passage.

Some one was banging and knocking against a door.

Loud, fearful, and frenzied shrieks arose.

It was a paroxysm of passion and frenzy.

This lasted for a few minutes.

Then there was the sound of a pistol shot.

Garrat ran forward, and unlocked the door of the room in which he had confined Mrs. Morgan.

As he had expected, he found her lying in a pool of blood, stone dead.

She had tried to get out, and could not.

Finding she was betrayed, rather than fall into the hands of the police, she had taken her own life.

Fighting Sue's troubles were all over.

The mad Queen of the Bushrangers was no more.

* * * * *

Young Jack and his companions returned at once to Harkawayville.

They were cordially congratulated by all upon what they had so pluckily accomplished.

All their troubles were over.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

ENGLAND ONCE MORE—TINKER'S GRANDEUR AND HIS MYSTERY!—
FUTURE PROSPECTS AND PROMISES—FAREWELL.

"I AM heart-sick of this place," said Harkaway. "But I haven't come across a spot that I like more than the

" ' Land that bears a well-known name,'

as the song says, and back I go."

"To England?"

"What else?"

"And what about Harkawayville?" demanded Harvey.

"Leave it where it is. Pick out the most intelligent of the settlers for the high places—give Rook a chance of doing better things now that he is convalescent—and hurrah for Old England! The associations of the place are too sad, now. Poor Hunston's sad fate I can never forget if I remain here. His grave shall be well cared for, by the best man I can find, for I shall remember that he was once my playmate and schoolfellow."

So it was agreed that they should return at an early date.

"My boy, Tinker, must go with us, dad."

"Of course," said Harkaway.

"I couldn't do without my boy Tinker," said young Jack.

"Of course not."

"Why, what with Mike and Nero and Tinker," said Mr. Mole, "you'll have quite a menagerie."

The preparations for the return of our friends to England were necessarily rather lengthy.

But at length the day arrived, and the whole settlement trooped down in a body to the seaport to see the embarkation of the party.

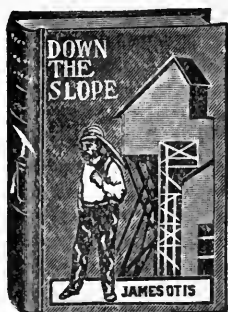
Cheers, hurrahs, and sighs of regret were sent after them.

But not one of the settlers from Harkawayville but wished them all God speed.

And now that Harkaway and his son have completed their journeys together, we and they make our respective bows to the courteous readers who have so long borne us company.

THE END.

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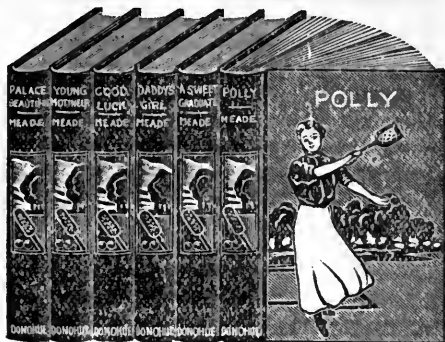
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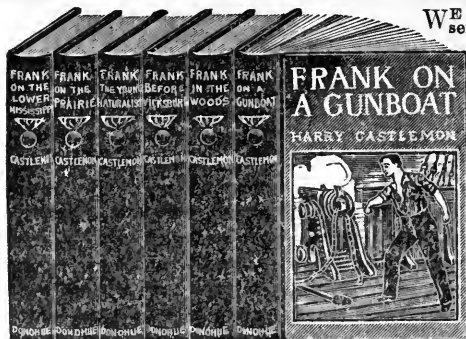
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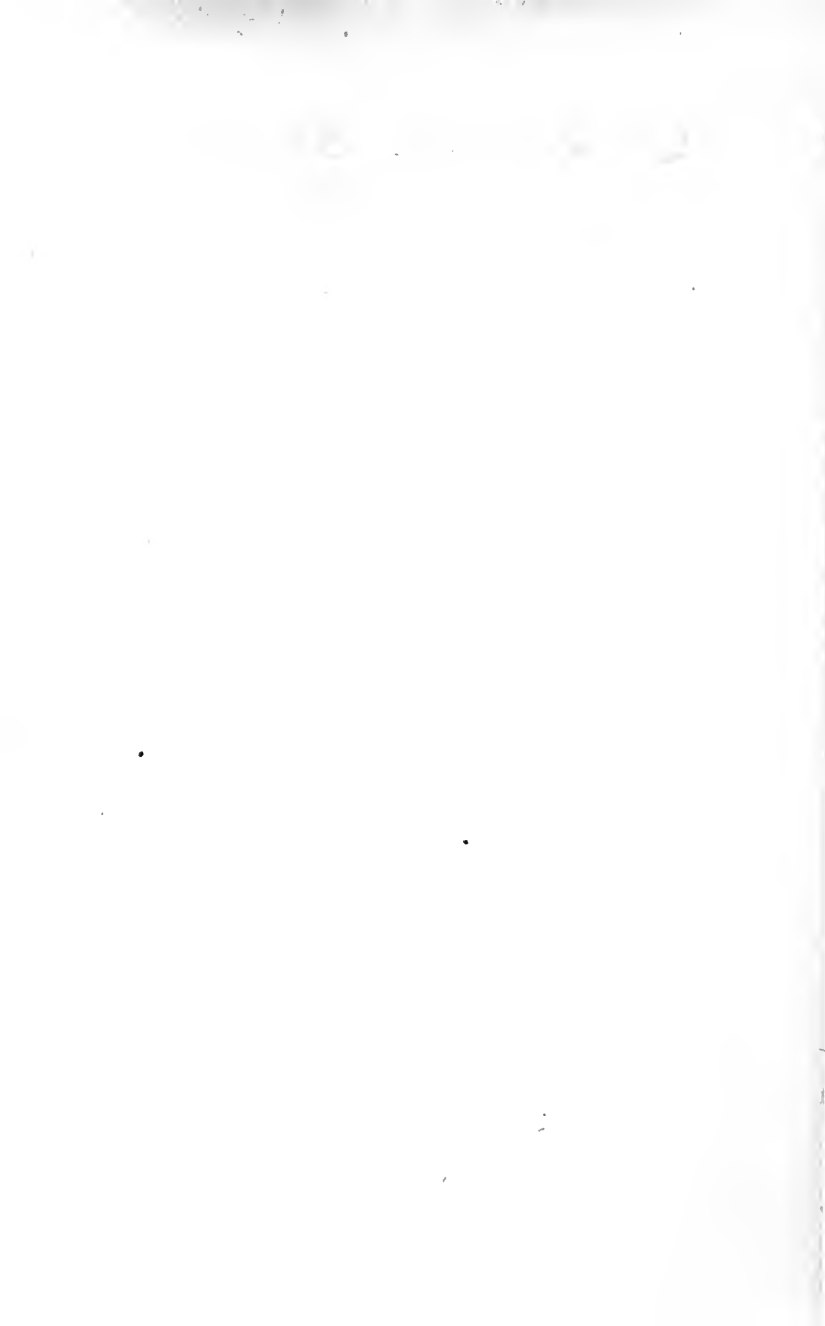
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